

ON THE SIDE Quick tip

There are some very expensive hangers out there with a special coating to keep blouses and dresses from slipping off. You can get the same effect at no cost by wrapping a rubber band around each end of a hanger.

www.thedollarstretcher.com

Word of the day

brumby (noun) — a wild or unbroken horse

Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary

Celebrity snippet

It's not every day that you see Robert De Niro on the cover of Vibe — with 50 Cent. They posed for the magazine's March issue to promote their new crime drama, "Righteous Kill," co-starring Al Pacino and Brian Dennehy. The movie is expected to be released this fall. 50 Cent, whose real name is Curtis Jackson, says he'd "hang out with Robert on Thursdays and Fridays" if he could. "His celebrity is so strong that I get a chance to feel like a normal person for a little bit," the 31-year-old rapper tells Vibe. "People get nervous around him."



50 Cent

Happy birthday

- Actress Zsa Zsa Gabor, 91
- Actor Rip Torn, 77
- Actress Mamie Van Doren, 77
- Actor Mike Farrell, 69
- NBC news anchorman Tom Brokaw, 68
- Singer Fabian, 65
- Singer Natalie Cole, 58
- Actor-director Robert Townsend, 51
- Actress Kathy Najimy, 51
- Actress Megan Gallagher, 48
- Vocalist Axl Rose, 46
- Singer Rick Astley, 42

Top 5 DVD sales

- 1. "Family Guy Presents Blue Harvest"
- 2. "Good Luck Chuck"
- 3. "3:10 to Yuma"
- 4. "Mr. Woodcock"
- 5. "Resident Evil: Extinction"

Nibble on this

Cocoa Love Chocolates are made with authentic dark cacao, real fruits and vegetables, gourmet spices, fresh nuts, unsweetened cocoa and natural plant based sweeteners. For more information, visit www.cocoalover.com.

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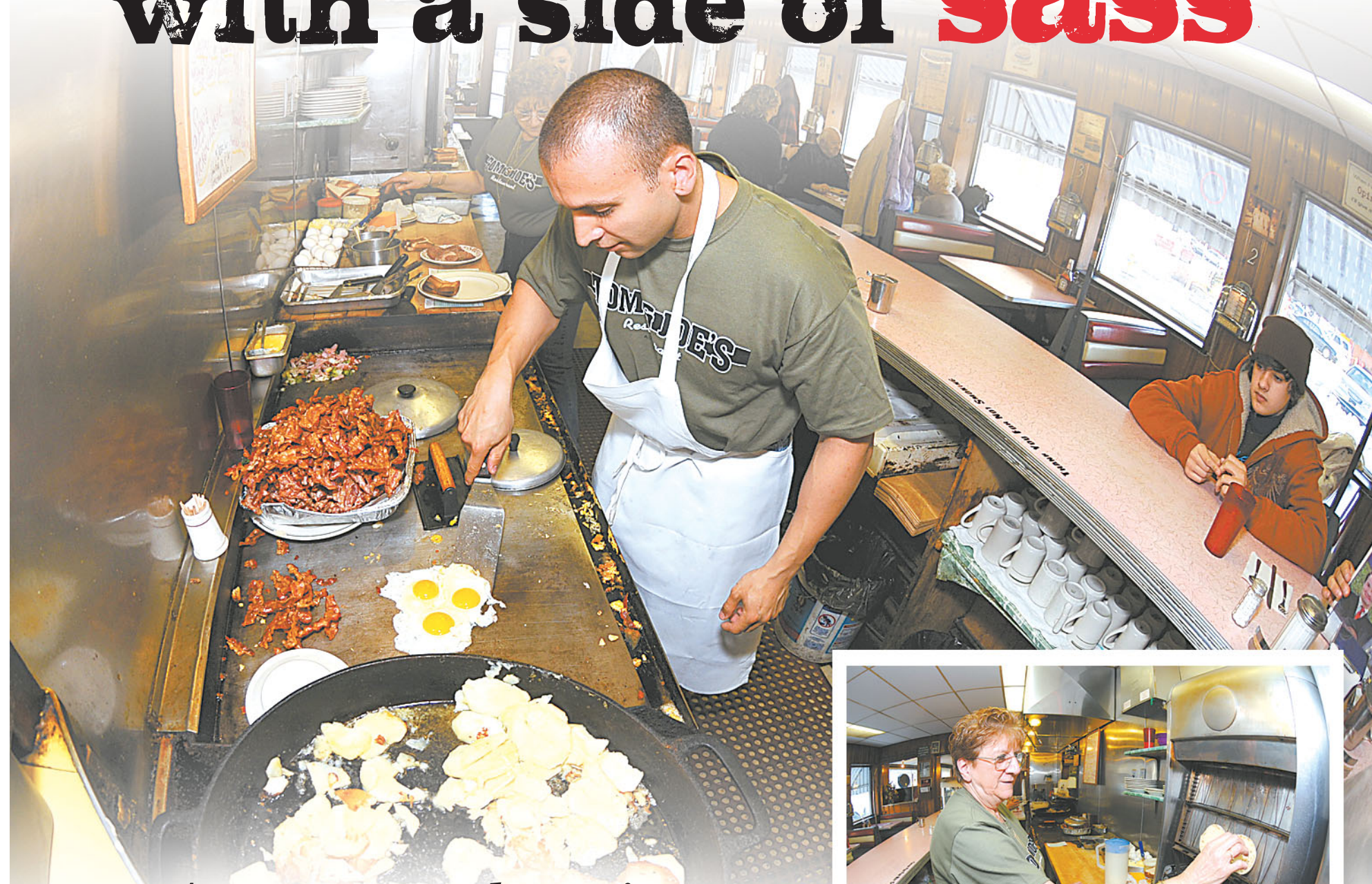
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life

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Submit entertainment to the Virtual Newsroom at www.altoonamirror.com

Homestyle cooking with a side of sass



At Tom and Joe's in Altoona, customers are treated like family

Editor's note: This is the first of a monthly series featuring area restaurants.

By ASHLEY GURBAL agurbal@altoonamirror.com

Not much has changed in the 50 years or so since Nick Drost started hanging out at Tom and Joe's. And that's exactly what keeps him coming back.

"There's not many places left like this," said Drost, 67, who lives in Altoona.

The social atmosphere of the diner in downtown Altoona is the same as when brothers Tom and Joe Batrus opened it in 1933, said owner George Batrus Jr., 34, Tom Batrus' grandson. He oversees the day-to-day operations with his father, George Batrus Sr.

In 1933, the diner opened across the street from its location at 1201 13th Ave., where it moved in 1950. It was renovated in 1956 and 2002. Co-founder Joe Batrus sold his share to Tom in the late 1940s.

"Their intention was to have a family place where friends meet, where friends kinda collect," George Batrus Jr. said. "That's still a big part of what we do today. The whole place is so social."

Tom and Joe's is definitely a social forum for Drost and his friends, who meet at the restaurant four to five times a week for breakfast and sometimes return for lunch.

"We have what we call the Breakfast Club," Drost said. "They save seats for us."

Bill Wilkinson of Altoona is a member of the Breakfast Club who was introduced to Tom and Joe's by his father, a former Altoona police officer.

"It's our own little group," said Wilkinson, 52. "We talk about women, the guys who aren't here. And we make fun of people. It's like a family."

Drost, Wilkinson and their crew aren't the only usual customers at Tom and Joe's. Most everyone is a regular, Batrus said — and first-timers quickly become one.

"Once they've been here once or twice, they're hooked," he said. "It's just a very different atmosphere. It's like you're eating at home. Everyone talks like they're part of a family."

And they do. Waitress Kimberly Rosenberry, Batrus' cousin, yells to diners in the smoking section, "Anyone want more to drink?"

Signs on the wall tell customers that "the more you tip, the nicer we are," and to "never question the cook's judgment." But Rosenberry, 40, doesn't need to advertise her sass.

"You get what you get, you eat it, you like it, and you shut the hell up," Rosenberry announces, and the restaurant erupts in laughter.

The staff's antics are a big draw for Martha Fleming, 70, who walks to Tom and Joe's almost every day from IDA Towers. She's been frequenting the diner since she was in her 20s.

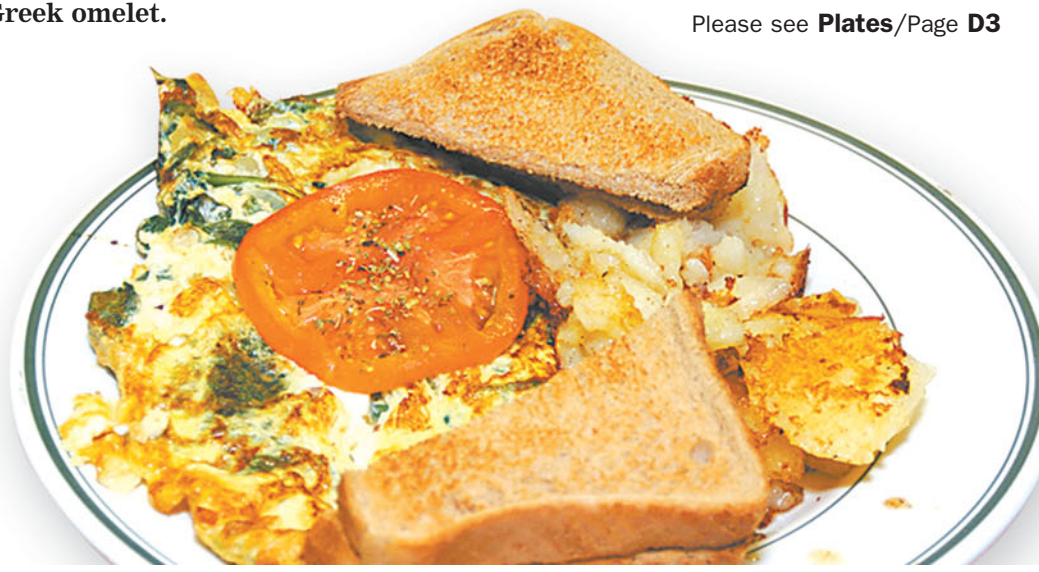
"I always say they put on a floor show," she said.

The banter between Rosenberry, Batrus and the rest of the staff is also one of the main reasons William Shaal and his wife, Donna, come to Tom and Joe's from Riggles Gap four times a week. They meet their friends Sandy Riley and Donna Copeta, both of Altoona, for breakfast.

Please see **Plates**/Page **D3**

Mirror photo illustration by J.D. Cavrich and Tom Worthington II

(Clockwise from top) Tom and Joe's owner George Batrus Jr. cooks breakfast with a skillet that's more than 50 years old; Donna Guyer, an employee for 45 years, loads English muffins into a Savory toaster that is also more than 50 years old; and waitress Kimberly Rosenberry takes Hollidaysburg resident Dennis Harnish's breakfast order. Below is a new menu item, the Greek omelet.



Behind the plates

Tom and Joe's

- Address:** 1201 13th Ave., Altoona
- Phone:** 943-3423
- Hours:** 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday; 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday; 7 a.m. to noon Sunday
- Price range:** \$5 to \$8 for a meal
- Dress:** Casual
- Atmosphere:** "Energetic diner atmosphere," said owner George Batrus Jr.
- Smoking section:** Smoking and non-smoking seating available
- Specialties:** Homestyle breakfast and lunch
- Seating capacity:** 95
- Alcohol:** No
- Reservations:** Accepted but not required