

Culinary Corner

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REVIEW



Bobby Cochran/CW photos

The coffee crew at Julia's includes, from left, manager Joe Zimmerman and baristas Mary Rhodes and Serena Stout. Barista Carly Ruff is not pictured.

Because of Julia

ReStore's new coffee shop benefits Habitat for Humanity

by Heidi Billotto
heidi@thecharlotteweekly.com

Julia's Coffee & Tea is now open in the Charlotte Habitat ReStore on Wendover Road. Named after Julia Maulden, the first volunteer executive director and founder of Habitat for Humanity in Charlotte, the nonprofit operation benefits the local organization to build homes for families in need.

The first Charlotte ReStore opened on Wilkinson Boulevard in 1996 as a fund-raising effort supporting the Habitat mission. The second ReStore, located on Wendover Road, opened in February 2006. Charlotte Habitat estimates that proceeds from the two ReStore locations and the new coffee shop will fund the construction of 10 to 12 new Charlotte Habitat homes each year.

Hundreds of volunteers remodeled the 34,000-square-foot space on Wendover that includes not only the ReStore operation but all of the Habitat Charlotte offices and living space for nearly a dozen full-time AmeriCorps volunteers.

Habitat Charlotte partners with AmeriCorps to provide a team of two experienced volunteers at each

Habitat homesite. AmeriCorps, a network of volunteers who work across the United States, is set up much like the Peace Corps is internationally. In Charlotte, Habitat utilizes the services of 12 AmeriCorps volunteers and several AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers each year.

Delicious developments

"The idea for a coffee shop came up shortly after Habitat purchased the building. It was once a grocery store and this space was the deli," explained Joe Zimmerman, a former AmeriCorps volunteer who is now Julia's manager. Zimmerman developed the concept, created a business plan and began operations.

Opened just a month ago, Julia's offers sandwiches and sweets with an extensive menu of coffees, teas, blended espresso beverages, smoothies, milk shakes, hot chocolate and soft drinks.

The smoothies begin with a premixed, tea-infused fruit base. Flavors like mango and peach whirled into a frozen slush sounded tempting but were a little too sweet. By far, Julia's best beverage bets are the coffees and blended coffee drinks. The menu rivals that of any coffeehouse in town, with many items superior to those at national chains. In addition to the standard American supersized cups of 12-, 16- or 20-ounce beverages, Julia's also offers the option of a traditional Italian-sized 7-ounce pour.

Zimmerman has visited coffee farms in South America, has talked with growers and knows the process from raw bean to beverage. Barista Serena Stout has been in the coffee business in Charlotte for 12 years, teaching barista techniques for the past five. Stout's specialty is latte art – pouring the foam on top of a latte in a freehand design. Stout regularly creates rosettes and hearts but explained that in barista competitions across the country, it's not unusual to see dragons, double rosettes and more elaborate designs.

"It's all in the quality of the foam and the rate at which it's poured onto the hot espresso," she explained. The process takes time to learn, but Stout hopes that the other baristas at Julia's will develop the skill so that no latte will be served unadorned.

Aside from standard coffees, lattes and espresso, specialty signature beverages include Julia's frozen Javalanche and a warm creamy latte called *tres leche* latte.

The Javalanche, as one customer told me, "is not for the faint of heart." This rich chocolaty blend of espresso, Mayfield vanilla ice cream and chocolate syrup is packed with both calories and taste. The barista will ask if you'd like it topped with whipped cream. My advice: Don't start skimping now. The generous dollop of real whipped cream is the icing on the proverbial espresso-laden cake.

Julia's *tres leche* latte is inspired by the Latin American dessert *tres leche* cake. In traditional recipes, the cake is baked and then soaked in a

JULIA'S COFFEE & TEA

★★★★ 1/2 out of 5

Location: In Habitat for Humanity's ReStore, at 1133 N. Wendover Road.

Phone: 704-295-4585

Price range: Beverages, \$1.49-\$4.39; pastries and sandwiches, \$1.49-\$6.50.

Hours: Monday-Friday, 6 a.m.-6 p.m.; Saturday, 7 a.m.-6 p.m.; closed Sunday.

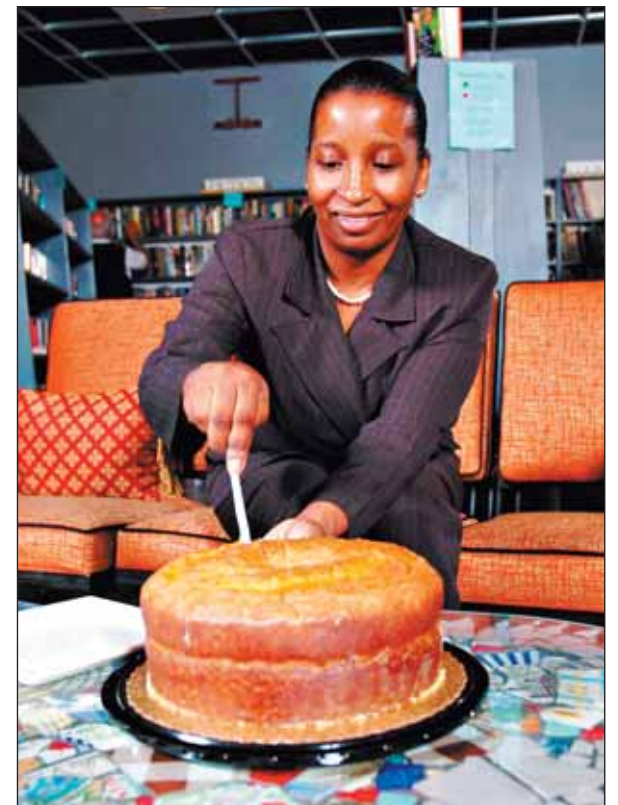
Details: Live acoustic music Saturdays 1-4 p.m.; small private meeting area; reading area; dine in and takeout; complimentary wi-fi.

For more information: Visit www.habitatcharlotte.org/partners_julias.cfm.

mixture of evaporated milk, sweetened condensed milk, and whole milk or heavy cream. One can only assume that the secret blend of creamy beginnings in Julia's *tres leche* latte comes from the same roots, beefed up by baristas with shots of espresso and, if requested, a raspberry or caramel finish.

To enjoy the basics, a trio of coffees is offered each day at Julia's: regular, decaf and a specialty blend of beans. All of Julia's coffees are imported by Counter Culture and the featured beans come from Finca Mauritania, a coffee farm in El Salvador, Habitat Charlotte's sister affiliate city.

"For every house Habitat builds here, Charlotte volunteers now build one in El Salvador, too," Zimmerman said. Over the past 23 years, Charlotte Habitat has built more than 700 houses in the Queen



Habitat success story/caterer Simone Dean now owns and operates Deanlicious Desserts & Others. Dean sells her cakes, cookies and brownies at Julia's.

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City and more than 500 homes in El Salvador. The Finca property is in the heart of Santa Ana, the location of many of the homes built by Charlotte Habitat volunteers.

Food, too

Julia's serves a variety of baked goods and premade sandwiches. The delicious assortment of sandwiches is delivered fresh three times a week from Plaza-Midwood's Common Market. Muffins, scones, Danish pastries and croissants come from D'Apollo's Bakery in Charlotte and the homemade rum cake, cookies and brownies are from Deanlicious Desserts & Others, a catering company owned by Habitat homeowner Simone Dean.

Dean is a Habitat success story. She and her family applied for a Habitat home nearly four years ago. After a year of waiting, they were accepted into the program and now they are almost finished paying the balance of their mortgage.

Several years ago, Dean was laid off from her job as a hosiery packer at Highland Mills. Before looking for another job, her husband and family encouraged her to attend culinary school at Central Piedmont Community College to renew her interest in catering. "I'd been baking cakes for people at church all



Julia's baristas turn coffee into art with designs of foam in hot espresso.

along, but now I was ready to turn it into a real business," Dean said. Working out of a leased kitchen, Deanlicious Desserts & Others now caters events for 10 to 350 people and makes cakes and sweets for any occasion.

About a year ago Dean was asked to speak at a Habitat function. She brought along samples of her desserts. Now

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Julia's Coffee & Tea

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Dean's rum cake, light and subtly infused – some of the best I've ever eaten – is sold by the slice at Julia's.

Tile art

The shop's warm, friendly atmosphere is enhanced by the extensive library of books donated to ReStore. Patrons can peruse the shelves and flip through a novel over a cup or purchase books to take home. Julia's interiors were creatively designed by Charlotte tile artist Brenda Ische, who worked with items donated to ReStore and reformulated them to work in the coffee shop. From chandeliers of dangling coffee cups to tile art indicating the route to the restrooms, Ische creatively used tiles and broken pieces of

china plates and cups to create Julia's beautiful mosaic tables, mirrors and floors. □

Want to know more?

Both locations of ReStore accept donations of building materials, appliances and home furnishings and sell them to the public to raise money for Habitat. For more information, call the Charlotte ReStore donation hotline, 704-392-4495.

Habitat Charlotte provides homeownership opportunities to families who demonstrate a need for affordable housing, the ability to pay a no-interest mortgage and a willingness to partner in the construction of their home. For volunteer opportunities, including traveling with Habitat Charlotte to El Salvador July 6-15, visit www.habitatcharlotte.org.

Eat out for autism

Autism Aware Fare is April 24

by **Regan White**
regan@thecharlotteweekly.com

On Tuesday, April 24, residents can enjoy a night out while both supporting the Autism Society of North Carolina's Mecklenburg County Chapter and increasing awareness of the disorder. For the sixth year, dozens of restaurants will participate in Autism Aware Fare Day, donating a portion of their sales to the local chapter.

It's an event that annually draws the eager participation of community members and restaurants alike, oftentimes through personal experiences with autism, a neurological disease for which there currently is no known cause or cure.

John Cavanaugh, president of Burke Communications which has assisted with the event's marketing, has a 9-year-old son who was diagnosed with autism five years ago. "He's a smart, loving child, but when he struggles to understand people or express himself, it just breaks my heart," Cavanaugh said. "As he gets older and that language deficit becomes more noticeable, I worry about what the future really holds for him."

Cavanaugh stressed the importance of the Autism Aware Fare for raising both crucial research funds and awareness. "Before Patrick came along, I had a very vague idea of what autism was; but thinking back, I probably interacted with people with autism all my life and didn't even know it," he said. "If I had been educated a little bit about autism through an event like this, I would have certainly understood and dealt with the challenges associated with autism better."

He looks forward to the Autism Aware

Fare every year. "To me, it's a day of hope for the future. We raise some funds, we enlighten some people, and for that day it's all about our kids and the adults in the community who deal with these challenges every day."

According to recent findings of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one out of every 150 children born today has autism spectrum disorder, a class of lifelong neurological disorders that includes autism, Asperger's syndrome and pervasive developmental disorder – not otherwise specified. ASD affects the functioning of the brain, resulting in symptoms that can range in severity and include difficulties with communication, compromised social skills and resistance to change. Early intervention is important in improving the condition with combinations of behavior modification, various therapies, medications, special diets, visual aids, and goals to develop both academic and living skills.

Participating restaurants include Brixx Pizza locations, Brooklyn South Pizzeria in Cornelius, The Capital Grille uptown, Charleys Restaurant, Colony Grill, dd Peckers Wing Shack, Friendly's in Huntersville, Great Harvest Bread Co., JP's Pizzeria, Jillian's, Le Peep, Matt's Chicago Dog locations, McAlister's Deli locations, The Melting Pot locations, Monterrey Mexican Restaurant, New York Pizza Express in Stallings, New York Pizza & Pasta in Indian Trail, Nothing but Noodles, Pizza Spiga in Matthews, Señor Tequila, Summit Coffee in Davidson, Tony's Pizza locations, Township Grille, Trio, Union Grille and Village Tavern.

To read more, visit www.thecharlotteweekly.com. For more on the event, visit www.autismawarefare.com. □