

What's lost when a family-owned diner closes for good?

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

- a. Put these places where you can eat a meal and/or have a drink in order from 1 (your favourite) to 5 (your least favourite). Give reasons for your choice.

formal restaurant

street stand or kiosk

café or diner

coffee shop (part of a chain)

fast-food restaurant

2 Key words

- a. Find the following words in the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. a noun meaning *a period of ten years* _____ (paragraph 1)
2. a noun meaning *a document you get from someone showing that you have paid for something* _____ (paragraph 2)
3. a noun meaning *something you keep to remind you of a particular person, place, or experience* _____ (paragraph 3)
4. an adjective meaning *with no writing or other marks* _____ (paragraph 3)
5. an adjective meaning *empty* _____ (paragraph 3)
6. a two-word noun meaning *two bad things happening at the same time* _____ (paragraph 4)
7. an adjective meaning *without enough money or people to operate effectively* _____ (paragraph 5)
8. an adjective meaning *involving feelings of happiness and sadness at the same time* _____ (paragraph 6)
9. a noun meaning *a series of people or things* _____ (paragraph 8)
10. an adjective meaning *famous* _____ (paragraph 8)

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David Dudley

12 September, 2022

- 1 It was a hot Sunday morning in June in Utah. The sun shone through the windows of DeDe's, the beloved restaurant that has served residents for the past decade. Link Feesago had just finished a plate of Kirk Orton's chicken-fried steak, eggs, potatoes and toast. "This is a tradition I wanted to pass down to my sons," he said. "Twice a month, we'd play golf and have breakfast at DeDe's café."
- 2 While Feesago waited for his receipt, DeDe Orton came over and asked him, "How did we do?" She asked everybody that, but this would be the last time she asked Feesago. DeDe's was closing, and that morning was Orton's last day. When I asked Feesago where he'd take his sons next week, he said: "I don't know if it's possible to replace DeDe's."
- 3 Sue Holland, a 78-year-old server said her own future was uncertain as well. That morning, the restaurant's mementoes were being packed away. "The walls are driving me crazy," Holland said, pointing at the blank spaces. "I've worked here for ten years and never seen them this bare." Tomorrow she would begin looking for another job.
- 4 Despite becoming increasingly popular, DeDe's was about to join the more than 90,000 restaurants that have shut down across the US in the past two years. Nationwide, restaurant sales are down \$65bn from pre-pandemic levels. The industry lost a million workers during the pandemic. Supply-chain problems and high fuel prices created a double whammy, adding to the delays and high costs.
- 5 Even before the pandemic, Orton struggled to find workers, especially cooks. St George, with a population of just over 99,000, is among the fastest-growing cities in the US. But mainly because of that rapid growth, the demand for services has exceeded the availability. Kirk Orton, DeDe's husband, has worked almost every day for the past five years just to keep up. He was already feeling overstretched. "But we couldn't stop", he said. "Bills don't take breaks."
- 6 In April, another pair of restaurateurs offered to buy the diner, and the Ortons decided to sell. The decision was bittersweet. Although now they could finally retire, they felt they were losing something – their idea of the American dream.
- 7 DeDe's was a family business from the start, Orton said. "From my mum to my 12-year-old grandson, every member of my family has helped some way. That was always my dream: to work with my family."
- 8 The restaurant's last day was slow. A procession of regulars came in to pay their respects – and to order their favourite dish one last time. There was a sense of loss in the air. I felt it myself; I had eaten DeDe's legendary chicken-fried steak once a week since I first moved to St George in 2020. As a freelance journalist, I've lived all over the US. As soon as I enter a new city, I seek out family-owned restaurants for fast, affordable homestyle cooking. They also serve as my introduction to the community. When I heard the other diners saying sadly, "We wish you weren't closing; we have no idea where to take our friends and our families," I knew exactly what they meant. We were losing our meeting place.
- 9 Later, DeDe Orton walked over to a corner table, tears streaming down her face. "It's hard," she said. "I'm excited about the future, but I'm going to miss the family and friends we've made. This was more than a business for me; it was my life." By 3pm, only a few people remained. Then the "open" sign in the window went off and DeDe's diner went dark.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Sue Holland was going to start a new job the next day.
2. DeDe's diner had become less popular.
3. During the pandemic, a million workers left the restaurant business.
4. Sales are now \$65 billion higher than they were before the pandemic.
5. It was particularly difficult for DeDe Orton to find cooks.
6. St George is the fastest-growing city in the US.
7. Kirk Orton had worked every day for five years.
8. DeDe's had always been a family business.
9. The restaurant was very busy on its last day.
10. The restaurant closed at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

4 Key language

a. Rearrange the words to make phrases from the text.

1. day the years almost past for every five
2. in Sunday June hot a morning
3. increasingly becoming popular despite
4. from business a start the family
5. the a loss air sense in of
6. was more me for than business a this

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Home-cooking is best."
- "Business is business. You have to move on."

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6 In your own words

- a. Open an internet search engine and type 'typical American diner' into the browser. Find out the characteristics of diners and the types of food and drinks they usually serve.
- b. work with a partner and create a menu for your own American-style diner. Try to incorporate some dishes from your local cuisine as well.
- c. Report your menu to the class.