

Halftime report for local restaurants in 2016



Two celebrity chefs that put their names and expertise behind two new restaurants highlighted the local dining scene for the first half of 2016.

Chef Art Smith launched his **1500 South** dining spot at Naples Bay Resort in March, while Chef Michael Psilakis debuted his **Teatro** in the new Southwest Florida Performing Arts Center in Bonita Springs on the last day of June.

The fact that both chefs have shined in an international spotlight for years with their multiple restaurants, cookbooks and TV appearances reflects well on our area's flourishing foodie culture. The Naples area is attracting big league attention.

Of course, 1500 South and Teatro are just two of at least 55 area restaurants that opened so far in 2016. Unfortunately, about 25 local restaurants closed during that same time period.

Café Luna has the incredible distinction of opening two new locations while closing another within a four-month period this year. Its latest just opened Thursday in Naples Walk shopping center on the southeast corner of Airport-Pulling and Vanderbilt Beach roads in North Naples.

NAPLES

Six weeks before a redevelopment project on Fifth Avenue South forced **Café Luna** to close its original location there at the end of April, a new location for the Italian restaurant launched in Liberty Plaza on U.S. 41 in Naples.

Three other eateries in that same razed strip of downtown Naples have yet to open new locations, although the owners of at least two — **Bella Maria Café** and **Avenue Wine Café** — have tentative plans to do so. **Kohr's Family Frozen Custard** most likely will not.

Despite the loss of these businesses, additional new dining opportunities appeared elsewhere on Fifth Avenue South. **Crispy Seafood and Wine Bar** popped up in March, **Shea's at Lansdowne Street** took the field in May, and **Thai Udon Café** debuted its second location in June.

Of course, 1500 South is on Fifth Avenue South, too, although it's not in the downtown strip west of U.S. 41 that first comes to mind when one thinks of the tony stretch. In February, **Catalina Café** also opened in Naples Bay Resort. Across from the resort, **Latitude 26** restaurant and bar launched inside the new Hyatt House hotel on Fifth Avenue South in March.

Other new restaurants opening in the city included **Pate's Island Club** in Park Shore Resort in March, **Mino Pizzeria Bar Ristorante** near Tin City in April, **Jimmy's Bait-N-Tackle Pub** at Ramada Inn in June, and **Midtown Kitchen & Bar** in the former TGI Friday's space, also in June. In February, **Kunjani Craft Coffee & Gallery** launched on Seagate Drive, and just outside the city limits, **Mimosa** opened on U.S. 41 in Tanglewood Marketplace.

Two longtime favorites closed in Naples Plaza this spring. **Mulligan's Sports Grille** quietly slipped away in March, followed by **Empire China** in May.

Nearby, **Thai Basil** was shuttered in early April after operating for many years. Other Naples restaurants closing in May were **Pompano Bar & Grill** and the relocated **Neighborhood Café**.

NORTH NAPLES

North Naples also has seen a lot of new restaurant activity so far this year. **The Crust Pizza** served up a popular second location off U.S. 41 in February, **Organically Twisted** rolled beyond its food truck at a brick-and-mortar restaurant in Marquesa Plaza in May, and **Moura Bistro** started sharing its Lebanese lineup at Meridian Marketplace in June.

Cooper's Hawk Winery & Restaurant is an up-and-coming chain that brought its first location to Southwest Florida in March on U.S. 41. Fast-casual chains that opened locations in North Naples include the neighboring **Firehouse Subs** and **Chicken Salad Chick**, which opened in Riverchase Plaza in January and May, respectively. Also in May, **Philly Pretzel Factory** came to the Galleria Shoppes at Vanderbilt and **McAlister's Deli** re-entered the regional market in May with a drive-thru at the new Creekside Corners on Immokalee Road.

In February, **Il Gelato** debuted off Wiggins Pass Road and **The Bowl** moved to its own digs off Pine Ridge Road. **Thai Thai Noodle Bar** replaced Benja off Airport-Pulling Road and **Second Cup** added a second location in a kiosk within Beach Box Café near Vanderbilt Beach.

In addition, a renovated **Trail Café & Grill** reopened in February after being closed for many months on the North Trail, Stage 62 Deli in Mercato became just **Stage Deli** in May after renovations, and Sakura Asian Grill in Meridian Marketplace changed its name to **Sakura Hawaiian Grill** in May to better reflect its cuisine.

We said farewell to **Fred's Food, Fun & Spirits** at the end of June and see ya to **Naples Smokehouse Deli** in March. In Granada Shoppes, **Coffee Culture Café & Eatery** closed before it actually opened, if that is even possible.

EAST NAPLES

The Coupe proved to be a coup for East Naples when it hatched in May in Naples Towne Centre. Across the East Trail, **I Burnt Mine Barbecue** started smoking in February.

Not to be outdone, **Whiskey Park** brought a new destination to the longtime former Captain's Cabin space in April, while **Waterside Caribbean Café** moved into the former English Pub digs in May.

Three cool new dessert spots started up in March: **Royal Scoop Homemade Ice Cream** in Berkshire Commons, **Mitch's Cookie Café** off Davis Boulevard, and **Sandy Scoops** Ice Cream in Sugden Park Plaza.

Oasis 41 introduced new locations for **Beefstro's** and **Dunkin' Donuts** on the East Trail in March. In May, **Five Guys** kicked off another unit at the new Stock Plaza on Collier Boulevard at Lely Resort, and **EatStop** flagged a new pit stop at Davis Boulevard and Airport-Pulling Road.

We permanently lost **Chrissy's Courthouse Tavern** in April, and **Andy's Susie's Too** and its adjacent **AJ's Ice Cream** in June. **Szechuan Chinese Restaurant** also closed in Courthouse Shadows in April but plans to reopen soon across the street in Naples Towne Centre. Likewise, **Henning's Chicago Kitchen** closed in April at Naples Outlet Center, but has plans to reopen this fall in North Naples.

GOLDEN GATE

Lima Restaurant and Pisco Bar debuted a new Peruvian place in May in the former space of **Antonia's Restaurant & Bar**, which closed in March on Collier Boulevard in Golden Gate.

In Golden Gate Estates, **Subway** sandwiched into Mobil at Randall Boulevard in February, and **Starbucks** brewed a new drive-thru in Cameron Commons on Immokalee Road in April. We sadly said later to **Estates Country Restaurant** in February.

MARCO ISLAND

Kane Tiki Bar & Grill fired up the Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort in May. At the end of February, both the longtime **Burger King** on the island and **Seven-O-One Bistro & Lounge** permanently closed.

O'Donoghue's Bar and Grill had its last call in June to make way for a future Pinchers Crab Shack.

BONITA SPRINGS

The year started off big for new dining options in Bonita Springs. In January, **Sharky's Pizza Pub** opened on Bonita Beach Road, and **The Garden Cafe** and **Ceviche 41** opened on Old 41 Road. **The Big Block Sub Shop** also reopened on Old 41 that month.

In May, **Palladio Trattoria** replaced **Fabio Trattoria Italiana** on Trail Boulevard off U.S. 41, and **Sweet Melissa's** Homemade Ice Cream & Key Lime Pies opened on Bonita Beach Road.

SOUTH LEE

At Coconut Point in Estero, **Rodizio Grill** inaugurated its Brazilian steakhouse in April, following another location for **Delicious Raw** juice bar in March.

EO Burgers came to Bell Tower Shops in south Fort Myers in February, which also saw the launch of **Luigina's Pizza & Grill** on U.S. 41 in San Carlos Park, and **Tasteria European Bistro** in Miromar Outlets in Estero.

New chain franchises included **Duffy's Sports Grill** in Fort Myers in February, **Nathan's Famous** near Page Field in March, **Zaxby's** at Gulf Coast Town Center in April, and **Fuzzy's Taco Shop** in Fort Myers in May.

Peace out to **Tilted Kilt** and **Belushi's**, which closed in January in south Fort Myers, as well as to **Johnny Rockets** which ended its long run at Coconut Point that month.

How Do Your Roll sushi franchise closed in February after only operating about four months near Gulf Coast Town Center.

In May, **Skip One Seafood** closed its location on San Carlos Boulevard en route to Fort Myers Beach, and **Yabo** restaurant closed its doors in south Fort Myers.