

NO KALE SMOOTHIES HERE

Dig in at the 'Best Greasy Spoon' around

Branford's Breakfast Connections — where a sandwich is a thing of beauty

By Lisa Reisman

lisareisman27@gmail.com

BRANFORD » There's nothing quite like a bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich at Breakfast Connections in Branford.

That's according to Leighton Davis, who needed sustenance after a high-impact workout on a recent Saturday morning. "It just satisfies in a basic way," said the Branford resident, seated in a booth with a group of friends

in the crowded, bustling space. "This sandwich is a thing of beauty."

That's the reason the Branford landmark formerly known as Scotty's — the name of owner Lori Pia Vincent's ex-husband — has on its canary yellow walls numerous "Best Greasy Spoon" awards from the 18 years Lori has been at its helm.

It's also why, if classic diners have seen their margins halved in recent years, owing to the ris-

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ing cost of rent, staff and even eggs, according to Crain's New York Business, Breakfast Connections is the exception.

The unassuming Main Street eatery in Lockworks Square across from Branford Shoe Repair serves platters, and sandwiches, that are proudly griddle-to-table and unabashedly cholesterol-laden.

As North Haven's Michelle Malerba, who was digging into a full stack of Texas Style French Toast, put it, "it's scandalously unhealthy. It's fantastic."

Of course, if you're dairy intolerant or have gluten or wheat

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At Branford Breakfast Connections, owner Lori Vincent, right, shares a conversation on the go with lunch customer Joan Duplessie of East Haven at the classic 'greasy spoon' eatery on Main Street in Branford.

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sensitivities; if you only eat food that's been labeled non-GMO or cruelty-free; if you're vegan or lacto-ovo or ovo-vegetarian, then Breakfast Connections is not the place for you.

With the exception of the Veggie Omelet, the laminated menu makes no reference to anything plant-based — unless you consider potatoes a vegetable. No one fresh-pressed the orange juice. And though the ingredients in Davis' sandwich weren't locally sourced, they did have a decidedly unique flavor.

"You get the taste of everything else that's been on the griddle this morning," he said. "I'd pay extra for that."

That kind of local flavor distills what Breakfast Connections is, according to Shelly Johnson, who's been coming to Scotty's, as she still



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Branford Breakfast Connections owner Lori Vincent provides a pleasant and personal atmosphere for customers that visit her breakfast and lunch eatery on Main Street in Branford.

calls it, since it opened in 2000.

"It's just a hometown, family vibe," said the Branford resident, as she

sank her fork into a short stack of syrup-drenched (non-organic) blueberry pancakes while a group of little kids clad in baseball uniforms trooped through the door. "Everybody and anybody meets here."

That's no surprise, considering Vincent's background. Until she was in the third grade, she lived three doors from the legendary Al's Restaurant at Winthrop and Whalley Avenues in New Haven.

"That's what inspired me," said the 51-year-old dynamo. "Just watching Al with the customers, how he took care of them. That's what I've always loved to do, to take care of people, help them, make them feel good."

Consider the \$4.50 Weekday Special of two jumbo eggs, home fries, toast and coffee for those on a fixed budget. And the host of regulars who assemble each weekday morning at the counter—among them, "a trucker, a fisherman, a farmer, and a few retired guys solving all the world's problems," said Rich Gambardella,



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Branford Breakfast Connections owner Lori Vincent, right, and waitress Janine Parente are always sharing their smile with customers who frequent the breakfast and lunch place on Main Street in Branford.

Vincent's partner, who helped open Breakfast Connections in North Haven in March.

Some of them are on a list of phone numbers Vincent keeps so she can check in if they don't show up for a few days. For that reason, Breakfast Connections is open 365 days a year from 6 a.m. to 1 p.m. "So my customers know they always have a place to come," Vincent said.

It's also the reason for the unusually deep booths in the front to accommodate large groups of friends and families, the invariably generous portions, and the bottomless cups of coffee. It's why short-order cook Heather Riha has been with Vincent since she was 16 — she's now 41 — and the rest of her long-time staff — Janine Parente, Patty Thompson, and short-order cook April Parsepe — is composed of old friends and neighbors.

It explains the large bin filled with matchbox cars and dolls for kids in the back of the diner. "Some-

thing to play with and take home," Vincent said. And the strict Christmas policy followed by Vincent and Gambardella: all the kids get gifts. "Some of them have been coming in since they were little and now they're in col-

lege and they still come in," she said.

"See the pictures?" Vincent asked, gesturing at two massive photo collages on the front wall. "Those are our customers. They're all friends."

So, sure, Breakfast Connections has no frills. And yes, the decor is a little kitschy. It's a bit dated. But then so are the prices.

"It's all good," said a weekday regular and retired firefighter who asked to be identified as Chick a few days later. "The cook remembers what you like, the wait staff remembers you. You sit and you get served. All automatic. And the food isn't bad either," he said, winking.

"It has restorative powers," said Davis, wiping the grease off his fingers with a satisfied grin.

Breakfast Connections is located at 1188 Main St., Branford. 203-483-4597. The North Haven Breakfast Connections is located on 344 Washington Ave. 203-234-6100. Payment is cash only. Parking is plentiful.



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Branford Breakfast Connections employee Heather Riha prepares lunch for a customer at the eatery on Main Street in Branford.



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Lori Vincent, left, says goodbye to patron Chick Manware of Clinton, a boat owner who keeps his boat at a Branford marina and who frequents the breakfast and lunch restaurant on Main Street in Branford.