

Restaurant Scene: Chattanooga's Vegan Chef Challenge features plenty of choices

July 1, 2025 by Lyric Lewin



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Roasted cauliflower, toasted flatbread, salty and tangy pasta. I have successfully expanded my range of vegetarian cooking so I can host meals for my herbivore friends - but with one fatal flaw. At an alarming frequency (and always last minute), I realize I

have added something decidedly not vegan to my dish. Feta sprinkled on top of the cauliflower, eggs in the flatbread, butter on the noodles.

So my vegan friends, invited to a dinner that has ultimately become inedible for them, smile politely and subsist on the ice cubes in their water glasses and nurse their wine as I frantically try to throw kale and garbanzo beans into a take-two meal.

Luckily for vegans at large in Chattanooga, during the entire month of July, a team of 18 restaurants and chefs have teamed up for the second year in a row to participate in the Vegan Chef Challenge.

The event is hosted by Vegan Outreach, an international nonprofit organization with the goal, according to a press release, of "aiming to reduce animal suffering ... by promoting a vegan lifestyle through education and making vegan options more accessible."

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I called and visited several spots on the list to see what was being offered.

Abdul (Wahab) Alabid and his wife, Jinan, own The Hummus Bowl (3931 St. Elmo Ave.). The refreshing array of vegetables and creamy hummus is already a safe bet for vegans, but Alabid is expanding the menu for this month to host four new options.

Alabid said one of the options will be a tortilla wrap filled with savory hummus, caramelized onions, bright sumac, peppery arugula and a side of vegetable sticks.

Then there will be a cauliflower dish that's roasted in the oven and covered in a house-made tahini sauce.

Next is an Egyptian dish called koshari that has a fragrant mix of lentils and legumes mixed with rice and topped with crispy onions.

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And finally, the selections include an offering of stuffed grape leaves that will be full of rice, a meatless meat made of mushrooms and spices.

"I want to give them also an experience," Alabid said via phone. He emphasized that he wants his restaurant to be a family environment where people can gather together to eat healthy food.

Another lunch option is found at Taqueria Jalisco (1639 Rossville Ave).

Taqueria Jalisco has taken one of its classics, the Huarache Mx, and updated it with a vegan spin. The crispy and warm cornmeal tortilla serves as a type of open face sandwich that is usually covered in some type of meat and drizzled with crema and queso fresco. But for the vegan challenge option, you can order the item with nopales (cacti) grilled to perfection and served on the cornmeal tortilla with a refried bean base, chopped onions, cilantro and a tomatillo avocado salsa. It was so flavorful that I didn't miss the sour cream and cheese.

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If you're looking for a vegan sweet treat, you will find plenty.

I spoke with the owner of Scoop Around Ice Cream Bar, Sharika Wilson. Located at 831 E. Main St., this ice cream bar is known for its colorful and fantastical ice cream combos, and if you are a fan of sweet and spicy flavor profile, you will love Scoop Around's July vegan feature.

Wilson said Scoop Around will have a mango-based Italian ice topped with a peach sauce and chamoy seasoning. Chamoy is a Mexican condiment featuring dried chilies and fruit like mangos or apricots and lime juice. A Popsicle will top the keepsake glass, and you can add some vella rose if you're feeling fancy (or if you don't have to work the rest of the day).



Star what was on the menu for July. They always offer a vegan chocolate muffin, but they are adding an apple cinnamon vegan muffin this month.

Other participants include 1885 Grill, Public House, Hangry Pinoy and Bleu Fox Cheese Shop. You can see the rest of the participants online at the Chattanooga Vegan Chef Challenge website and vote for your favorites anytime from now until July 31.

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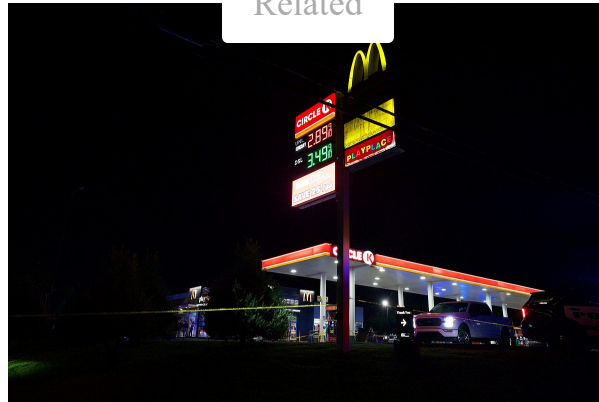
Lyric Lewin has covered food stories across international kitchens and newsrooms. As a photo editor her work with the CNN Photos team was recognized by the National Press Photographers Association; and as a photographer her images have appeared in Esquire, and Condé Nast



Traveler among others. As a writer her work has appeared in Whetstone Magazine, Zagat and Culture Magazine. She graduated with a degree in journalism from the University of Georgia. Subscribe to her weekly newsletter for more information of the food scene in Chattanooga: whattoeatnextchattanooga.com

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