



food for all

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It's hard to drive a few miles in Des Moines without spotting a food truck. Delicious smells and unique menu items convince those traveling on foot or by car to stop for a bite to eat. Crowds gather and wait patiently for their names to be hollered from open truck windows.

According to an article published by IBIS Research Reports last year, "The food truck industry has experienced a boom over the past five years, primarily as a result of the surge in gastronomy in the United States."

Gastronomy can be defined as the practice or art of choosing, cooking and eating good food.

The surge is evident in Des Moines. Even well-known establishments such as The Machine Shed and Scratch Cupcakes have taken their businesses on the road.

Cat Wood, a front-of-house executive at The Machine Shed in Urbandale said having a food truck is a great way to reach people that normally wouldn't have the opportunity to eat at the restaurant. When taking their farm-to-table menu on the road, items such as loaded mac and cheese and smoked brisket are crowd favorites.

These kitchens-on-wheels are a picture of organized chaos. The inside of a food truck is crowded and full of constant communication. An average of three people work inside the truck to take orders and prepare food for hungry customers.

Aaron Byrd, owner of Street Eats DSM, worked in the restaurant business for over 30 years. After joining the food truck business four years ago, Byrd said the independence and flexibility that comes with owning a truck is his favorite part.

"I get to set my hours, I get to set my menu; if something's not working, I can change it, and I don't have to ask anybody," Byrd said.

Food trucks can be mobile and travel the area or stay stationary. Popular mobile food trucks like The Big Red Food Truck, 515Pi, Street Eats DSM and Up In Smoke can be tricky to find.

"One of the biggest reasons you don't see them out and about more than you do is because the majority of us stay busy with private events or catering," said Shon Bruellman, owner

of The Big Red Food Truck and Hotsy Totsy.

One way to make it big in the food truck industry is to work events in downtown Des Moines such as the Arts Festival or the recent World Food Festival.

The Hall in Valley Junction hosts food trucks daily. The street food served ranges from Mediterranean gyros at Taza Fresh to loaded tater tots at Hotsy Totsy. Trucks are constantly rotating their menus.

Another quick way to track down Des Moines' popular trucks is by following them on social media. Many trucks update their Facebook and Twitter accounts weekly, letting customers know where they'll be, when they'll be there and what they'll be serving.

Although food trucks are becoming more popular in Des Moines, getting into the food truck business can be difficult.

"The majority of food trucks that start don't make it," Bruellman said. "You have to have the right truck, the right food and the right price points. There's a lot that goes into it. You're definitely not guaranteed to be successful right off the bat. It can take a long time to get started."

With success, there are always challenging aspects that those in the food truck business must overcome.

"Guessing what the crowd size will be is hard," Bruellman said. "You want to have enough food but not too much. You never want to run out. There is luck and skill involved with trying to know how much food will be involved with a particular event."

Byrd added that the weather can be one of the most frustrating aspects of food truck operation.

"For the most part, we're seasonal," he said. "If it's cold or raining, people aren't going to come outside to get food."

These inconveniences haven't stopped the food truck connoisseurs of Des Moines from bringing delicious meals and a unique atmosphere to its streets.

Whether you're in the mood for home-style comfort food, a fast-fired pizza, or authentic tacos, the food trucks of Des Moines have got you covered.