

# FOOD & DINING

## Salty Goat Grill a beacon of hope amid crisis

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At the Salty Goat Grill in Leicester on Wednesday morning, few things were as in demand as a steaming hot cup of coffee. “I hadn’t had coffee in five days, so I was having a caffeine fix,” said Diane Smith, a 76-year-old lifelong resident of the

township. Only a few hash browns were left on her otherwise empty plate — a warm meal that was a far cry from the tomato sandwiches and bananas she’s been eating at home, which is still without power. Leicester, an unincorporated community of over 21,000 people according to the 2020 Census, is located approximately 15 miles north-

west of Asheville. Compared to much of Western North Carolina, the semi-rural area escaped the worst of the flooding from Hurricane Helene. Still, power, water and internet are patchy. No one interviewed for this story had all three, with the exception of the Salty Goat Grill itself. Located in the heart of the township’s main street, New

Leicester Highway, the Grill only lost power for two days, co-owner Erin Vazquez told CharlotteFive. And even then, the generators kept the fridges running. Vazquez and her husband, Rick, who worked at the grill under the previous owners, have owned the former Smokey Mountain Diner for the last two years. Normally, the menu is

quintessential diner-style, offering everything from biscuits and gravy in the morning to steak for dinner. But nothing is normal now. Though operating on a limited menu, the Grill is busier than usual, with people coming from devastated places like Swannanoa and Black Mountain just to get a hot meal and a dose of normalcy. Other options in the area, which unlike Asheville is not chock full of restaurants on every corner, include Shorties BBQ, serving food for free or donations and Grateful Roots Market & Deli. The latter store usually serves Amish meats and cheeses from Ohio but have

SEE RESTAURANT, 3C



When the French Broad River flooded Asheville’s River Arts District, it left destruction in its wake. Summit Coffee Co.’s damage is extensive: Its main wall is nearly gone, its roof partially caved in and a mixture of mud and debris lies inside.

## They watched from Charlotte while Helene took Asheville shops

BY SAMANTHA HUSTED  
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Kaitlyn Burton’s role as director of operations for PIE.ZAA looks different these days. Instead of managing the day-to-day operations of the pizza joint’s two stores, this week she’s focused on making phone calls to her employees, checking to see if they are alive. “It’s been terrifying to try and communicate with employees ... There’s still some people we haven’t heard from, and we’re trying to communicate with them every single day,” Burton told CharlotteFive on Wednesday, Oct. 2. PIE.ZAA is a late-night pizzeria with locations in both Asheville’s South Slope Brewing District and Charlotte’s South

End neighborhood. While Burton lives in Charlotte, she’s a Henderson County native. For her, Hurricane Helene hit extremely close to home. “Now that the rivers have gone down, we can really see what’s been going on — cars flipped over, houses completely washed away. It’s so surreal,” she said of the storm’s extensive damage. Reaching Asheville employees has been difficult — not just for Burton, but for many Charlotte business owners with locations in Western North Carolina. With cell phone service scattered at best, communication has been a hurdle during this unprecedented time. One employee Burton was able to reach is the Asheville store’s general manager, Kayla Smith. Burton said Smith was

trapped in her neighborhood with roads leading in and out blocked by fallen trees and other debris, making it nearly impossible for cars to enter or exit. “She (Smith) was walking for three hours to be able to find any cell reception to connect with me,” Burton explained. Thankfully, a family member was able to reach Smith and get her to safety. While Burton diligently checks on her employees’ welfare, PIE.ZAA owner Tyler Kotch is using his trusty chainsaw to help clear roads. “Tyler has been very adamant about taking his chainsaw and cutting down trees to make sure that roads are becoming accessible,” Burton said. “Whether that’s our employees or random people.”

Kotch was also able to bring essential supplies to the Asheville store’s assistant manager. While Burton still doesn’t know the full extent of the damage to PIE.ZAA’s Asheville location, she says it seems that Helene left it mostly unscathed, though the store is still closed and without power or water. Other businesses, like Summit Coffee Co., which has an Asheville location just down the road, weren’t as fortunate. “We didn’t have a loss of our entire business or anything like that, which we’re extremely thankful for and almost feel guilty over,” Burton said. “But our employees are out of work now, and without them working, they can’t make money for their families.”

SEE HELENE, 4C

## 5 food trends to look out for in Charlotte, according to national culinary experts

BY KAYLEIGH RULLER  
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The first FOOD & WINE Classic in Charleston boasted a star-studded lineup of national culinary talent including Maneet Chauhan and Tyler Florence, who took to the stage for cooking demos and educational seminars. It also highlighted local culinarians who presented seemingly endless rotations of food.

With attendees and talent flying in from across the country Sept. 27-29, the festival bubbled with energy and indulgence, featuring 100+ vendors that leaned heavily into Southern foodways, complemented by a fair share of international wines and spirits to sip and buzz about. “When we do this the right way, it’s like an adult weekend long summer camp,” Hunter Lewis, editor-in-chief of Food & Wine, told CharlotteFive. “You



National culinary talent including Sean Brock and Rodney Scott took to the stage and to the Grand Tastings for cooking demonstrations and to share bites of their food at the FOOD & WINE Classic in Charleston.

can come and have your fun, and people can create that magic back home.” I got to attend this adult

weekend long summer camp, and the magic I’m bringing home comes from these seminars, the strolls through food-

and-drink-dreamland (aka the Grand Tastings) and the many conversations with chefs, food writers and sommeliers around the dinner table each night. I gathered 5 key takeaways that might unlock insight into trends and leading values in the both the Southeast and national food, beverage and hospitality scene. One message is clear: There’s an overarching upsurge of values in the hospitality industry — diversity, social inclusion, progressiveness, mentorship. Other values that surfaced through at the festival’s educational seminars include sustainability, consumer education, local sourcing, and transparency. Even outside of the microcosm of the industry that was the FOOD & WINE Classic in Charleston, one can see the movement toward value-driven

SEE FOOD, 4C

## Restaurant supports electrical linemen working to restore power

BY MARI PRESSLEY  
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A Rock Hill restaurant steps up to support linemen, providing thousands of meals to those restoring power in NC. In the wake of Hurricane Helene’s devastation across the Southeast, outages have left more than a million in the Carolinas without power. Amidst the chaos, a Rock Hill restaurant known for its significant site in civil rights history has become an advocate. Kounter has temporarily closed its doors to regular customers — to support linemen at Duke Energy as they tend to relief efforts. Kounter’s team, led by Chef Rob Masone, is currently serving between 600 and 800 meals daily at Duke Energy’s training facility in Kings Mountain. “We got a phone call and prayed about it, and it just felt like we needed to put our talents to use,” Masone told CharlotteFive. “We’re going to go do some of the things that we do well for some of the folks that are dealing with a lot of things that none of us want to imagine dealing with on a daily basis right now, but I couldn’t do this without my entire team. This is a lot. It’s a big ask.”

US FOODS COVERS SOME COSTS IN HELENE RELIEF EFFORT With support from US Foods, which is covering refrigeration costs and helping with the logistics of food supply, the partnership between Kounter and Duke Energy has become an essential part of the disaster relief efforts. Masone expressed his appreciation for US Foods’ role, noting, “We have a good relationship with US Foods here in Rock Hill .... US Foods reached out and said, ‘How can

SEE LINEMEN, 3C