

# The Fresno Bee

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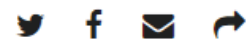
## Dining diagnosis: The Grove at Clovis Community Hospital is a local favorite



Jeff Dinmore, executive chef of nutrition and dining at Clovis Community Medical Center, takes a pizza from the the brick oven at the hospital's Grove Cafe. DOUG HOAGLAND/SPECIAL TO THE CLOVIS INDEPENDENT

By Doug Hoagland

Special to The Clovis Independent



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You can find one of Clovis' most interesting restaurants in a most unexpected place.

The Grove Cafe is part of Clovis Community Medical Center. It's designed to serve the 1,700 employees at the hospital, many of whom work 12-hour shifts.

But the Grove is also popular with people in the community – folks who neither work at the hospital nor have a loved one receiving care.

One day, a woman showed up with an ice chest and ordered 12 milkshakes – made with ice cream from Hanford's Superior Dairy. The shakes were for her child's sports team, said Paul Luchi,

director of nutrition and dining services.

Does it bother him that members of the public drop in to eat or to take something home?

"Not at all," Luchi said.

Jeff Dinmore, executive chef of nutrition and dining, agrees: "It's flattering."

Luchi and Dinmore work for Thomas Cuisine Management, an Idaho company that has a contract to run the hospital's food services, including the cafe. The two men worked together in Boise before coming to Clovis.

Under their guidance, the Grove opened almost four years ago, replacing a traditional hospital cafeteria. The restaurant features a varied menu that ranges from comfort food such as meatloaf and chicken fried steak to healthy grains such as quinoa, couscous and wheat berries.

The prices might make you think you've stepped into a time warp and gone back a few decades.

"A cheeseburger and fries for four bucks? People say, 'I'm in,'" Luchi said. "Our food is really, really, really good, and you can't beat the prices."

For example, the Grove serves seven-inch pizzas for \$3.59. On the build-your-own option, guests get a choice of four toppings from Canadian bacon, sausage, pepperoni, bacon, mushrooms, olives, bell peppers, jalapenos, pineapple, tomatoes, onions and extra cheese.

The pizzas are cooked in a gas-fired brick oven, and the dough is stretched into the shape of an oval.

"We have to be different," Dinmore said of the shape. "I've never seen an oval pizza."

Whatever the shape, the Grove's pizzas are popular. The cafe sells about 100 each day.

Sometimes, friends introduce friends to the Grove.

That happened to Rich Merritt, one of the leaders in the local Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He meets with six boys from Buchanan and Clovis North high schools for bible study, and sometimes they share a meal.

Buchanan senior Keaton Gleason suggested the Grove. Merritt still remembers their conversation.

"We have to eat at the hospital," Gleason said.

"Are you crazy?" Merritt responded.

"Coach, trust me. It's fantastic," Gleason said.

It took several tries, but finally Merritt gave in, and they went to the Grove.

"To my pleasant surprise, it was fantastic," he said. "The food was great and cheap."

The group had pizzas and milkshakes.

"I'll definitely go back," Merritt said.

At the salad bar – which features almost 30 ingredients – nearly everything is fresh. In addition, the Grove prepares all the toppings: roasted pumpkin seeds, glazed pecans, toasted coconut and homemade bacon bits.

Unlike some eateries, the cafe doesn't charge for salads based on weight. A large salad container is \$4.99 and a small one is \$2.99.

Guests in the mood for a sandwich pay \$3.99 for a whole sandwich and \$2.99 for a half. There's a daily special and eight standard sandwiches on the menu. The standards change periodically to offer variety to customers.

One of the sandwiches is the Asada Steak Wrap – marinated grilled steak, caramelized onions, roasted peppers, pepperjack cheese, chipotle lime mayo, lettuce and tomato, all rolled in a house-made flatbread.

The Grove Banh Mi is another sandwich option. It's made with slow-roasted, five-spiced pulled pork and served with hot and sour kimchi slaw on a sourdough baguette.

Guests also can opt to build their own sandwich, choosing from 10 meats (they get two), 12 breads and other ingredients. Homemade potato chips can be purchased with all sandwiches.

Entrees vary each day, as do the side dishes. One day recently, the two entree choices were Dijon Chicken (\$3.49) and a lean offering, Raspberry Tea Pork Loin (\$2.59). There were four side dishes, each priced at 89 cents: parsley red potatoes, steamed white rice, broccoli and bell peppers, and Brazilian sauteed kale. (White rice is offered everyday.)

On other days, entrees could be sesame-crusted salmon, pesto-grilled chicken breast, quinoa-stuffed peppers, carnitas, rosemary pork loin, bacon-wrapped pork loin, tri-tip and more.

Attention to detail extends to some of the Grove's smaller offerings. The cafe, for example, makes its own pickles by infusing quartered cucumbers in brine for seven days. Vinegar – which is added to store-bought pickles to extend shelf life – is not used in the Grove's pickles.

Luchi and Dinmore take pride in what they have created at the cafe.

Luchi has been in the business for 30 years and still gets frustrated when a guest lodges a complaint.

"People tell me, 'Don't worry. You can't please everyone.' But dang it, I'm going to do what I can do to make it right. You have to care," Luchi said.

Said Dinmore: "There has to be some passion involved. My passion is culinary."

The Grove is on the first floor at Clovis Community Medical Center, 2755 Herndon Ave. The Grove is open daily from 6:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. and 1 to 3 a.m. Breakfast is served from 6:30 to 10 a.m. The restaurant's grill and pizza oven are open from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. for lunch and dinner. The deli area, which serves sandwiches, is open from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.



Sara Jensen, a cook at the Grove Cafe at Clovis Community Medical Center, shows homemade potato chips that are made and served at the restaurant. DOUG HOAGLAND/SPECIAL TO THE CLOVIS INDEPENDENT



Pork ribs and corn on the cob were served during BBQ Thursday at Clovis Community Medical Center's Grove Cafe. DOUG HOAGLAND/SPECIAL TO THE CLOVIS INDEPENDENT

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