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Weekend

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Breakfast Champions

By Larry Fox

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hat's for breakfast? In Washington, it's more a question of what isn't. What once was one of the more predictable meals of the day—cereal, toast, eggs and boredom, anyone?—now is one of the more interesting.

At area dining rooms and diners, bakery counters and bagel palaces, breakfast is turning into a meal with everything. Take the menu at the Cafe Promenade, which offers crab cakes as well as pancakes. Or the Original Pancake House in Bethesda, which has pancakes that

look familiar and then some that are a radical change: giant puffy pancakes covered with apple slices, glazed with cinnamon and sugar, and stuffed with sauteed apples.

Too much, you say? Then you obviously aren't a regular at the Southern Diner in Clinton, where you can have pork chops and eggs for breakfast, and certainly you haven't been spotted at the Vienna Inn, where you can top off a stack of 'jacks with a chili dog.

It's all there, waiting for your order. Here is a sampler of the wide variety of breakfast spots in the Washington area.:

VIENNA INN

The first reaction a newcomer may have when he or she walks into this low, nondescript building on busy Route 123 in the heart of Vienna is: "Oh-my-god-it's-a-biker-bar!"

Nothing could be further from truth. The Vienna Inn is a neighborhood institution, at least several rungs above a neighborhood hangout. The 35-year-old inn is owned and operated by the Abraham family (Meyer, also known as Mike; his wife Mollie, and their son Philip). Its charm, Philip Abraham believes, is that it "feels like a bar in

your hometown. It's comfortable and low-key."

It has all the accoutrements of a local institution: scores of sports trophies ("We sponsor soccer, lacrosse, flag football, touch football, softball and Little League teams," Philip says); souvenir T-shirts, which show Mike Abraham holding up a beer mug or his face on a chili-covered hot dog in a bun, and a timeworn decor of wooden booths and chairs and formica-topped tables.

As in the mythical "Cheers" of TV fame, the Abrahams do seem to know everybody's name. On a recent Friday, Philip stopped his frenetic shuttling between cash register, phone and kitchen to chat with a departing couple, Rich and Carol Weaver of Waldorf. The Weavers were headed to West Virginia for a vacation, but decided to stop for breakfast even though it wasn't on the way.

"If it's Friday, it's time for the Vienna Inn" said Rich Weaver, who works for a local defense contractor. "And if I didn't come in on Friday, Mollie would hit me up the side of my head."

Breakfast here can range from the usual—eggs, pancakes, toast—to the unusual: chili dogs, hamburgers. Everything, explains the menu, but a poached egg. "It takes too much time and attention and our profit margin is too small," Philip explained.

The star of breakfast menu is the pancakes. "You must try them," urged Mollie, "and then have a chili dog for dessert." The pancakes are good, thick and slightly sweet. Their appearance is homemade, much like those mom used to make, and not anything at all like those golden brown and perfectly round ones you get in many restaurants.

The breakfast menu items are a bargain. Where else can you get an egg, home fries and toast for \$1.25? Other egg dishes range from \$1.50 for two eggs (\$2.25 with bacon scrapple, sausage or ham), to \$4.50 for steak, a pair of eggs, homefries and toast. The menu also offers four omelettes (cheese, Tex Mex with salsa, western, and ham and cheese) for \$2.25 and up, breakfast sandwiches offering egg with toast, bacon and other dressings for \$1.25 and up. And for the brave or reckless, there is always a chili dog for dessert, \$1.25, mustard and onions included.

VIENNA INN — 120 E. Maple Ave., Vienna. Open 7 a.m. to midnight Monday through Saturday, 9 to 5 Sundays. Breakfast served until 11 a.m. weekdays, until 1 weekends. 703/938-9548.

