

Banker's Dozen

At this restaurant in Washington, only the recipes are under lock and key.
By Lori Williams

THERE'S GOLD IN Althea's Vault in Washington. Amber-colored granola sits between layers of yogurt and strawberries in the menu's Breakfast Candy. For lunch, a slaw with homemade celery seed vinaigrette lends a kick to the restaurant's bountiful burger or grilled veggie sandwich. But the recipes were hidden from prying eyes for years. And like any high-value asset, these secrets had password protection.

"The granola recipe comes from my mother-in-law, and the slaw recipe is from my mom," says Casey Wilson, who owns Althea's with her husband

Blythe. "Years ago, Mom gave me a piece of paper with the passwords to access her recipes on it."

Thankfully, finding Althea's is easier than unlocking those recipes. The restaurant is on Washington's main drag, in the 1927 brick building that once housed the First American Bank. There are still vault doors here, but instead of a teller, patrons visit a glass counter with homemade brownies, Swiss rolls, salted caramel and turtle cheesecakes, cupcakes, cookies, and pastries decorated with butter cream frosting. Althea's also serves 100 percent fair-trade Arabica coffee in its

macchiatos, lattes, and cappuccinos. But the town's enthusiasm for Althea's has been as vital to the restaurant's success as its owners' culinary prowess.

"We have a great community that has supported us from the day we opened," says Blythe. "But what really allows us to make a living is the catering side of our business. We'll deliver anywhere."

The Wilson family's can-do attitude is what made this restaurant a success.

"Opening the restaurant was a big leap of faith for Casey and me," says Blythe. "Before this, I was working long hours at a coffee company in Norman, and it was pulling me away from my family."



The bakery case at Althea's Vault in Washington is filled daily with Swiss rolls and other baked goods. Visitors also can order custom-made cakes baked in-house by the Wilson family.

Now, Althea's Vault is a family affair as Blythe, Casey, and the five Wilson children all work in the restaurant business together.

"All our kids pitch in," Blythe says. "They're learning what it takes to run a business in a community where everyone knows your name."

Now, in this community, everyone knows Althea's.

"Althea' is the title of a Grateful Dead song," says Blythe. "We also chose that as the name of the restaurant because it means 'capable of healing' in Greek. We wanted to create a place where everyone feels welcome."

The recipes may be a closely guarded secret, but in this small Oklahoma town, there's no hiding what makes this place a success.



Althea's Vault, 218 North Main Street in Washington, (405) 288-0150 or altheasvault.com.