

What's lost when a family-owned diner closes for good?

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Put these places where you can eat and drink in order from 1 (your favourite) to 5 (your least favourite). Give reasons for your choice.

coffee shop (part of a chain)

formal restaurant

café/diner

street stall

fast-food outlet

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

bittersweet
procession

freelance
receipt

legendary
regular

overstretched
stroke

prohibitive
whammy

1. A _____ is a medical condition in which blood is suddenly blocked and cannot reach the brain.
2. A _____ is a document showing that you have paid for goods or services.
3. A _____ is a customer who often goes to the same bar or restaurant.
4. A double _____ is two bad things happening close together or at the same time.
5. If costs or prices are _____, they prevent people from buying something because it is too expensive.
6. If a business is _____, it doesn't have enough money or people to operate effectively.
7. A _____ situation or event causes feelings of happiness and sadness at the same time.
8. A _____ is a series of people or things.
9. A _____ person, place, or event is well known or famous.
10. A _____ worker is one who is not permanently employed by a company and sells their services to more than one.

What's lost when a family-owned diner closes for good?

Level 3: Advanced

More than 90,000 diners have closed in the last two years. DeDe's, in Utah, is one of them

David Dudley

12 September, 2022

- 1 It was a hot Sunday morning in June, a typical summer's day in Utah. The sun beamed through the windows of DeDe's, the beloved restaurant that has served residents for the past decade. Link Feesago leaned back in his seat with a satisfied sigh, having just finished a plate of Kirk Orton's chicken-fried steak, eggs, potatoes and toast. "This is a tradition I wanted to pass down to my sons," he said. "Twice a month, we'd play golf and have breakfast at DeDe's café."
- 2 That tradition began years ago, when Feesago's mum treated him to lunch there. But she suffered a stroke in 2021 and hadn't been able to visit. "When DeDe found out, she made my mum's favourite meal – a ham, mushroom and spinach omelette – and delivered it to the care home," Feesago said. "It's more than food. DeDe made us feel like family."
- 3 While Feesago waited for his receipt, DeDe Orton came over and asked him, "How'd we do?" She asked everybody that, but this would be the last time she asked Feesago. DeDe's was closing, and that morning was Orton's last day. When I asked Feesago where he'd take his sons next week, he echoed what the other regulars I'd spoken to over the last few weeks said: "I don't know if it's possible to replace DeDe's."
- 4 Sue Holland, a 78-year-old server said her own future was uncertain as well. That morning, as the last orders were being prepared, the restaurant's mementoes were being packed away. "The walls are driving me crazy," Holland said, gesturing at the blank spaces. "I've worked here for ten years and never seen them this bare." Tomorrow she would begin looking for another job.
- 5 Despite becoming increasingly popular, DeDe's was about to join the more than 90,000 restaurants that have shut down across the US in the past two years. Nationwide, restaurant sales are down \$65bn from pre-pandemic levels.

The industry lost a million workers during the pandemic. Supply-chain problems and high fuel prices created a double whammy, adding to the delays and prohibitive costs.

- 6 Even before the pandemic, Orton struggled to find workers, especially cooks. St George, population just over 99,000, is among the fastest-growing cities in the nation. But largely because of that rapid growth, the demand for services has exceeded the availability. Kirk Orton, DeDe's husband, has worked almost every day for the past five years just to keep up. He was already feeling overstretched. "But we couldn't stop", he said. "Bills don't take breaks."
- 7 In April, another pair of restaurateurs offered to buy the diner, and the Ortons decided to sell. The decision was bittersweet. Although now they could finally retire, they felt they were losing something – letting go of their idea of the American dream.
- 8 Orton's career as a restaurateur began 15 years ago. Marcia Waggoner, Orton's mother, told me that DeDe was a fantastic cook who never used a recipe, as well as a natural hostess who cares for people. No one was surprised when she opened her own place.
- 9 DeDe's was a family business from the start, Orton said. "From my mum to my 12-year-old grandson, every member of my family has helped in some way. That was always my dream: to work with my family."
- 10 The restaurant's last day was slow. A procession of regulars came in to pay their respects – and to order their favourite dish one last time. There was a sense of loss in the air. I felt it myself; I had eaten DeDe's legendary chicken-fried steak once a week since I first moved to St George in 2020. As a freelance journalist, I've lived all over the US. As soon as I enter a new city, I seek out family-owned restaurants for fast, affordable homestyle cooking. They also serve as my introduction to the community. When I heard the other diners saying sadly, "We wish you weren't closing; we have no idea where to take our friends and our families," I knew exactly what they meant. We were losing our gathering place.

What's lost when a family-owned diner closes for good?

Level 3: Advanced

11 Later, DeDe Orton walked over to a corner table, tears streaming down her cheeks. "It's hard," she said. "I'm excited about the future, but I'm going to miss the family and friends we've made. This was more than a business for me; it was my life." By 3pm, only a few people remained. Then Samantha, another long-time server, reached over and pulled a plug. The "open" sign in the window went off and DeDe's diner went dark.

© Guardian News and Media 2022
First published in *The Guardian*, 12/09/2022

What's lost when a family-owned diner closes for good?

Level 3: Advanced

3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What was Link Feesago's 'tradition'?
2. Why couldn't his mother visit the restaurant any more?
3. What would Sue Holland need to do the following day?
4. How many workers did the US food industry lose as a result of the pandemic?
5. What are the components of the 'double whammy' that affected many businesses?
6. Why has the demand for services exceeded availability in St George?
7. What did the Ortons feel they were losing when they decided to sell their diner?
8. According to her mother, what did DeDe Orton never use?
9. What does the author of the article do whenever he enters a new city?
10. What did the regulars feel they were losing when the diner closed for the last time?

4 Key language

a. Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make phrases from the text.

1. family	a. space
2. care	b. dream
3. blank	c. cooking
4. supply	d. home
5. American	e. chain
6. homestyle	f. business

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Eating at family restaurants is always better than eating at fast-food chains."
- "Business is business. You shouldn't cry over it."
- "Recipes are a waste of time. Instinct is the best way to cook a meal."

What's lost when a family-owned diner closes for good?

Level 3: Advanced

6 In your own words

- a. Use an internet search engine to find information about the fastest-growing towns and cities in the US (of which St George is one). Find out the main reasons for their rapid growth.
- b. Report your findings to the class.