

Nebraska Geographic

with ALAN J. BARTELS

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Anytime is a Good Time for Coffee (part 2)

My quest to stay awake during long hours traveling Nebraska in search of stories and photo opportunities has led me to seek out the state's most interesting coffee shops.

There is a coffee shop in Oshkosh that is unlike any other coffee place in Nebraska. Mark Ferrari came to Oshkosh from his family's macadamia nut and coffee farm in Kona, Hawaii. Ferrari liked the quiet community and welcoming residents of his business partner Mike Piva's hometown, and soon moved his Italian coffee roaster into a former downtown farm implement dealership.

Turns out that Oshkosh is a good central location for shipping coffee nationwide. Mark Ferrari Specialty Coffees didn't need to open a small coffee shop in the front of the building, but the community needed it. Ferrari's coffees have been described as "nutty, with a wine-like profile and chocolate-like aroma that captivates people's senses." His rare Kona coffee beans are grown only on the fertile slopes of Hawaii's Hualalai volcano.

I suggest taking the tour, stocking up on bags of Kona Gold, and then ordering a steaming cup of Kona goodness and some macadamia nuts for your own Sandhills voyage.

209 W. First St., Oshkosh. (308) 772-0138.

Time for some coffee talk. You know what, not all coffee places are the same. Quality, flavor, and temperature of coffee vary widely between roadside stops. I still have not entirely forgiven the fast-food place that sold me a cup of coffee that I did not realize was cold until I was a mile down the road.

One time at a convenience store in the Panhandle – I won't say where – I was nearly poisoned. I'm glad I looked before I took a sip after pumping the air pot on the counter to fill the provided Styrofoam cup. A greenish cleaning solution, probably dumped in by the night shift before closing, was still in the machine the next afternoon. I hope nobody drank that. I was so shocked and disgusted that I handed it to the clerks and left without my caffeine buzz.

I recently added a new favorite to my list of preferred Nebraska coffee shops. Anthem Coffee opened in October 2022 in Thedford. I found out about this newcomer while finishing my latest book, "100 Things To Do In The Nebraska Sandhills Before You Die," and was able to work-in a small mention about the

place. I soon became an infrequent regular, stopping by if I was passing through during business hours.

Months later when I was in town for a book signing, I stopped by for lunch. The Chicken Salad Sandwich that I had was loaded with Craisins, walnuts, celery, and of course, chicken, all served on a pretzel bun. It really was incredible.

I'm a people watcher. I find it interesting to watch rancher after rancher walk into Anthem wearing boots and spurs and order what I am sure at least some of them have referred to in the past as "foo-foo coffee." I've heard more than one of them ask for "an extra shot." Those Sandhills cowboys work long hours on the range, and I know that sometimes sleep is in short supply.

Anthem took over the space of a former café along Nebraska Highway 2 on the east side of Thedford that hadn't been open in a few years. My friends who live there are so thankful. I mean, what are the odds of a new coffee shop/café/bakery/hangout place opening in a small town like Thedford?

The White Chocolate Mocha is a local favorite. Anthem gets their coffee beans from another of my favorites – Normal Roasting Company in Burwell. Anthem Coffee is located at 39295 Nebraska Highway 2, Thedford. (308) 645-2381.

In my opinion, everyone should have a favorite local coffee shop. After my morning commute I often begin the day at mine, Something's Brewing Café in Ord. This small shop is located on the southeast corner of the town square that once was home to the still talked about Roy's Place cafe, and before that, the legendary Valley Fire Espresso. Something's Brewing opened in June 2021.

There are two places in Ord that I simply call "SBC." If it is between 7a.m. and 2 p.m., "SBC" is the café. If it is 4p.m. or after, "SBC" refers to Scratchtown Brewing Company.

Anyway, the front door at Something's Brewing Café has always been a little tough to push open – push it hard. Then, stroll across the creaky wood floor to order. There are usually three roasted coffees available and a whole host of fancier drinks, baked goods, smoothies, and other offerings. The breakfast sandwiches and burritos aren't baking under a heat lamp, they are made to order. Come lunch time, there is a daily lunch special that is advertised the day before on Facebook. Sometimes it is a burger, a Philly, Chinese food, or a Cuban sandwich. Sandwiches and wraps fill the regular menu.

The Nebraskan is a panini style sandwich that features roast beef, caramelized onions, and gouda cheese on wheat bread. I've been known to hang out in the morning and then stop by later for lunch, or maybe a scoop of ice cream.

Owner Michelle Nelson stepped away from a decades-long career in dentistry to pursue her dream of owning a restaurant. I am one of the many regulars who are thankful that she is there. It's the kind of comfortable place where one particular regular customer feels he has the right to waltz in, grab a cup, and head to the air pots and help himself.

I haven't, I mean, that guy hasn't been yelled at, yet.

Safe travels – and watch for deer!