



Oklahoma Today™

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Here Comes the Sun

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Welcome Table

Three Oklahoma restaurants are fighting hunger by welcoming all customers—whether or not they can pay.
By Bria Bolton Moore

CHIRSTY MOORE KNOWS what it's like to be hungry. Growing up in Santa Barbara, California, she watched her brother walk into a corner market to put food in his pockets to provide for their family.

"I have compassion for people who are struggling with food insecurity today because I've been there, and I know what that feels like," says Moore,

founder of **Tulsa's Table**, a pay-what-you-can community café.

Soup kitchens, food banks, and churches are known for providing meals to those in need, but three Oklahoma businesses are exploring a new model. **Tulsa's Table**, **Five80 Coffeehouse** in Enid, and **OpenTable Community Café** in Owasso are restaurants that encourage guests to gather around the table regardless of their ability to pay. Everyone is welcome. There are numerous opportunities for diners to contribute—they can pay the suggested donation price, contribute below that amount, donate extra to provide food for someone else in their community, or work in exchange for a meal.

With a focus on fresh fare made from locally sourced ingredients, **Tulsa's Table** began in June 2014 with a pop-up café at Phillips Theological Seminary. Since then, Moore, along with a chef and volunteer team, has hosted four similar events throughout the city. With menu items like zucchini carpaccio, ratatouille with sweet corn creamy polenta, and gluten-free chocolate beet cake, **Tulsa's Table** attracts those who can pay while also welcoming those who cannot.

Gourmet treats at suggested prices are also on the menu at **Five80** in Enid.

"It's this space where you have someone with money who can afford to eat or drink wherever he wants alongside someone who can't afford a thing," says Sarah Herrian, who opened **Five80** in July 2013 with her husband Jeremiah.

When a guest orders a cold brew coffee or an Okie Dokie—a panini with spinach, artichokes, mushrooms, and fontina cheese—a cashier shares the suggested donation price and asks, "What would you like to pay today?"

Tulsa's Table, founded by Christy Moore, offers pop-up cafés around the city that include an education component with lessons on cooking and nutrition.

Fifteen to 20 percent of guests pay more than the suggested cost, and 10 to 15 percent pay less. A jar next to the register holds additional cash donations.

"The jar shows the generosity of our community," Herrian says.

Generosity also is on display at **OpenTable Community Café** in Owasso. Although there's plenty of room to spread out, the restaurant's tables are pushed together, encouraging guests to eat with strangers and get to know their fellow diners.

OpenTable debuted in June 2014. The menu changes daily and features made-from-scratch items like cream of mushroom soup, apple cinnamon French toast, and banana Nutella muffins. Guests pay by dropping contributions into a black box located in the corner.

One day, says **OpenTable** executive director Melinda Foster, the restaurant had already closed when a young woman with two small children came to the front door. Foster welcomed them and fixed the hungry family a late lunch. After eating, the mother washed dishes while her five-year-old son swept the floors.

"Everything is reciprocal," Foster says of the café's give-and-take model.

That family's visit to **OpenTable** offers a glimpse of what all three Oklahoma pay-what-you-can cafés are working to create—a place where everyone is invited, everyone is entitled to fresh food, and each person has something to offer.

Get There: **Tulsa's Table** operates periodic pop-up cafés. (918) 640-8345 or tulsastable.org. **Five80 Coffeehouse** is open Monday through Saturday, 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. 122 East Randolph Avenue in Enid, (580) 233-3483. **OpenTable Community Café** is open Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 2:30 to 4 p.m. for youth café. 12650 East Eighty-sixth Place North in Owasso, (918) 376-4947 or opentablecc.org.



EVAN TAYLOR