



Nikita Seal, owner and operator of ZZ's Ice Cream Puffs

SALLY VERRANDO

Cooking for the Long Haul

Fresh international food is served at the Truck Yard Alliance. BY SALLY VERRANDO

Vendors have peddled street food since ancient times, evidenced by the discovery of a market stall in the ruins of Pompeii, Italy. Fast-forward to the chuck wagon, Wienermobile, ice cream and taco trucks of the past to our modern-day explosion of 21st century food trucks. More than fast food, these kitchens on wheels take carefully crafted international cuisines to the streets.

Truck Yard Alliance is one place where food trucks converge seven nights a week. This trailer-park-kitsch beer garden and adult playground opened in 2023 in Keller at the edge of Alliance Town Center.

Jason Boso, CEO of Brain Storm Shelter Restaurants, brought this down-home concept to Dallas in 2013 and added locations in The Colony as well as Houston. The first Truck Yard outside of Texas is set to open in 2024 in Oklahoma City, said T.J. Brown, the general manager of Truck Yard Alliance.

THE TRUCK YARD EXPERIENCE

Even with its two-acre spread, Truck Yard cultivates a cozy atmosphere.

"We're a 'come as you are' spot where you can kick back and relax," Brown says. With daily live music and no cover charge to enter, it's a popular place to hang out.

Couples and groups of all ages lounge outside in mismatched folding lawn chairs, chatting quietly around wooden cable-spool tables. Gas-log fire pits take the chill off the air. Children and leashed dogs accompany some adults. Detached pickup truck

beds serve as platform seating. Cornhole boards and the adjacent dog park nestle near an old windmill.

Performers like Jacob Armitage strum their guitars on the outdoor stage, singing acoustic versions of popular songs. When not in use, the stage folds up into a classic Airstream trailer. Strings of white lights crisscross overhead to provide soft backyard ambience. The multi-colored neon of the vintage, working Ferris wheel adds a festive vibe.

While Truck Yard is family-friendly, every night after 9 p.m., it's just open for those 21 and older. "Sorry, not sorry," the sign says.

Inside, the bar offers more seating and a wide variety of custom beverages. Second Rodeo Brewing, a sister company in the Stockyards, provides three types of its many craft beers. Truck Yard Alliance has 15 taps for beer and nine for house-batched draft cocktails. Frozen drinks and seasonal cocktails are also on the menu.

Some premium cocktails are served in glass bottle flasks. "It is a Truck Yard-Second Rodeo thing. Our flask cocktails do really well," Brown says.

FOOD TRUCK FARE

Truck Yard's own food truck, open Thursday through Sunday, serves cheesesteaks, nachos and hot dogs. Two to four additional mobile food trucks offer distinct multicultural recipes. The schedule is on Truck Yard Alliance's website.

A common factor for many of these mobile entrepreneurs is a background in food service.



Jason Boso, CEO of
Brain Storm Shelter
Restaurants

COURTESY BRAIN STORM SHELTER



T.J. Brown, general
manager of Truck
Yard Alliance

SALLY BRANDO

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Patricia and Joseph Jones, owners of Taste of Louisiana; birria tacos from Avila Arepa Scratch Kitchen; a lively night at the bar; Jru Brown gives King Kong Tacos and Wings a strong thumbs up

Truck on over to the Truck Yard Alliance

3101 Prairie Vista Drive, Fort Worth
truckyardalliance.com

Hours:

Monday and Tuesday
 3 p.m. - midnight

Wednesday
 1 p.m. - midnight

Thursday and Sunday
 11 a.m. - midnight

Friday and Saturday
 11 a.m. - 1 a.m.

Kids and dogs are welcome, but after 9 p.m., leave the kiddos at home. Doggos are still welcome. Truck Yard does not take reservations but party space rentals are available. Schedules for food trucks, performers and the Ferris wheel are on the website.



COURTESY TASTE OF LOUISIANA



COURTESY AVILA AREPA SCRATCH KITCHEN



COURTESY KING KONG TACOS & WINGS



SALTY VERBANO DO



SALLY VERRANDO

Taste of Louisiana specializes in Cajun flavors. Joseph and Patricia Jones, New Orleans natives, started their food truck in May 2023. Joseph has more than 40 years of cooking experience, including 35 years in the Merchant Marines. He spent many years as a chief steward, which is basically a chef, he says.

Taste of Louisiana dishes are created from the Joneses' original recipes for gumbo, jambalaya, crawfish etouffee, boudin balls and poboys. Fried catfish and dirty rice are customer favorites, Joseph says.

King Kong Tacos & Wings first opened its food truck three years ago at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Martin Ybarra had been a chef in Albuquerque and a manager of some large chain restaurants. When he decided to open his own place, his wife, Tracy, says, "Let's try a restaurant with wheels first."

They wanted to make fresh, simple Mexican-American food—tacos, burritos, nachos. Adding wings is a tribute to Breyana, their 22-year-old daughter who died in 2016 of leukemia. Tacos and wings were her favorite foods.

In 2024, the Ybarras plan to open an additional brick-and-mortar location with a snow cone vendor at the Arete Athletics Center in McKinney called King Kong in Paradise.

Avila Arepa Scratch Kitchen began its food truck service of Venezuelan and other Latin American cuisine at the beginning of the pandemic. Jorge Da Rocha is a chef and son-in-law to the owner-operators, Jose Antonio and Maribel Masri. Born in Venezuela to Portuguese parents, Da Rocha has lived in Miami and traveled the world. He's worked as an executive chef for restaurants and catering.

"We have the limitations of space, storage, refrigeration," Da Rocha says about the food truck. We have to charge the propane everywhere we go. But I love working in the truck. I see people trying the food, and I get to say 'hello.'"

Nikita Seal, owner-operator of ZZ's Ice Cream Puffs, says she has tested new products at Truck Yard Alliance. Her specialty is

a custom-made glazed donut sliced in half with a scoop of ice cream topped with a choice of sugary breakfast cereal. When served, the donut is warm, but the ice cream remains cold.

Her concept is California-inspired, she says, from the donut to the palm tree images on her bright pink trailer. She figured out the process and created her own versions of the dessert. She's working on a seasonal menu for colder weather.

COVID-19 interrupted her plans for a brick-and-mortar location. The pandemic was a horrible thing, but a blessing in disguise for starting her business.

"Food trucks allow you to test the concept to make sure people actually want it," Seal says. "You get an up-close experience of what your customers want."

As an Air Force veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom, she worked in hospital supply procurement. Afterwards, she worked for food companies before launching ZZ's, named after her twins.

Seal is an active member of Shift/Co, a mentoring group for conscious entrepreneurs. She also attends the Coffee Talk Professional Development Series of Tarrant County College's Office of Corporate Solutions & Economic Development. She says a session on emotional intelligence helped her with a deeper understanding of herself and others.

"This newfound awareness has helped me to build stronger relationships with colleagues, clients and customers," she says. That lesson "stands out as a game-changer."

THE TRUCK YARD EFFECT

Truck Yard Alliance lets entrepreneurs refine their business models and allows flexibility. Patrons get to choose from a wide variety of menus and relax in a nostalgic, unpretentious backyard environment.

"My favorite part of Truck Yard is the atmosphere," Brown says. "If I didn't work here, I'd be hanging out here all the time." 🍷