

The city of Denton has a heart that beats like a drum. When darkness consumes the blistering sun this North Texas town lights up with the sounds of local musicians living their dreams, the aroma of expertly prepared feasts, and an ambiance that most certainly lives up to the Texas standard.

## GOOD TIMES IN DENTON

BY SANETTE LUDICK

PHOTOS BY CAROLINE BASILE



On any given night, inexpensive bars and restaurants on Fry Street are jam-packed and buzzing with activity, while during the day students and locals drift through bookstores and coffee shops.

It's all small-town with big city variety. Here's the thing about Fry Street: it has, without a doubt, a lively student vibe but there is more to Denton than Fry Street and its vibe is of a whole different kind.

The city of Denton offers an assortment of local music, restaurants, bistros and bars, and all of them boast great service, great food and a great atmosphere. However, we don't want great. We want exceptional, and that's what we found.

### **Green with Envy**

Long-time general manager of GreenHouse Restaurant & Bar, Nicole Probst, says "Customers really, really want to sit in the bar because it's so cool in here."

What makes GreenHouse so cool? Perhaps it's the classic dark wood bar or maybe it's the signature cocktails sophisticatedly mixed by 26-year-old bartender Francesca Cape. She goes into detail about martinis and experimental cocktails like "The Good, The Bad and The Ugly," made with Republic Tequila, yellow Chartreuse muddled with fresh jalapeno, lime and crisp cucumber. What more can a customer ask for? How about two outside covered patios and an open-fire Mesquite grill?

That's why this place has been around for 15 years. GreenHouse offers customers versatility when it comes to food and mood but consistency when it comes to friendliness. "You can come here after work with friends and also on your 10-year wedding anniversary, and have those events catered to your needs," Probst says. "That's priceless to us."

### **Local Beats at Banter**

Maybe you're looking for something with a different beat? Look no further than Banter. Located off the Denton Square, this modestly sized bistro boasts an unpretentious character and owners with a love for local art and musicians. Lead guitarist for Denton-

**Photos on first page:** (left) Classical guitarist, Bryan Burns, performs at Hannah's- Off-the-Square every Tuesday from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. and alternating musicians (classical guitar) entertain diners on Thursdays at the same time.

**Right:** Hannah's seared Ahi Tuna served with wasabi mashed potatoes, local shiitake mushrooms, Cardo's sunflower greens and jalapeno soy sauce.

based rock group 11:40, Zach Howell, describes Banter as “one of the staples and epicenter of this city’s diverse artistic heartbeat. It is a venue that prides itself on quality. The quality of the art chosen to be on its walls, and the quality of the acts that perform in their establishment.” Singer Zach Scoggings attributes 11:40’s success to Banter for allowing the group to play when they couldn’t get their foot in the door anywhere else.

This reminds me of a conversation I had with owner Ellen Ryfle a few days earlier about how she and business partner, Stephen Johnson, consider Banter the community center of Denton. Sitting in the back, close to the stage, Ryfle named her customers as they entered the establishment: that’s Travis (he’s a poet) or this is Richard (a musician).

Later, I stop by Travis’ table. His blue hoodie is pulled over his head, and he’s hunched over as he scribbles in a notebook. Writing poetry, I guess. We chat for a bit. It seems like something people do here — friendly banter. He talks about poetry night and how the venue is a more appropriate medium than other neighborhood coffee shops because of its intimacy.

For Warren McCallum, bassist for 11:40, Banter — especially Thursday open mic night — serves an essential role by offering seasoned and amateur musicians a stage to perform and make an impression on Denton’s expanding and exploding local music scene.

Banter attracts a variety of artists as well as lovers of the arts. Whether you’re searching for a quiet setting to enjoy an early afternoon espresso or want to be part of a flood of faces anticipating the local musical talent — Banter beautifully blends family-friendly atmosphere with effortless local performances.

### Award-Winner

There is something in the soup at Hannah’s-Off-The-Square. Or maybe it’s something in their martinis — it’s unclear. However, it is quite clear staff and management have high aspirations



### GreenHouse Restaurant & Wine Bar

600 N Locust  
Denton, TX 76201  
(940) 484-1349

[greenhouserestaurantdenton.com](http://greenhouserestaurantdenton.com)  
Jazz Mon. nights 10 p.m.-12 a.m.  
Drink specials from 8 p.m.

School Faculty & Staff  
specials Thurs. (with ID)  
Outside Dining

### Banter Bistro

219 W Oak St.  
Denton, TX 76201  
(940) 565-1638  
[dentonbanter.com](http://dentonbanter.com)

### Hannah's Off-the-Square

111 W Mulberry St.  
Denton, TX 76201  
(940) 566-1110  
[hannahsoffthesquare.com](http://hannahsoffthesquare.com)  
Happy Hour Daily from 3-6 p.m.

and one not-so-simple goal: to execute “restaurant Nirvana,” says general manager Robert Marshall. He believes the creative genius behind the magic at Hannah’s is Chef Sheena Croft whom Marshall admires for her imagination and passion when it comes to food.

Croft is currently featured in the 2013 chef’s guide, Best Chefs of America, and she admits Hannah’s secret is “utilizing local produce and dairy while focusing on the freshest and highest quality ingredients.” The specials at Hannah’s shine like Chef Sheena. “Those are dictated by what local farmers deliver to us and what is in season at that particular time,” she says. Every day the folks at Hannah’s strive to offer customers a dining experience with an authentic Denton feel in an upscale setting — from the local art displayed on the walls to expertly pairing a bold wine with one of Croft’s full-flavored creations.

“It’s pretty magical,” says Marshall. He is right.

### Bright Lights, Big City

Whether you are a local dropping by for happy hour or a tourist passing through Denton, the city invites you to play, to explore or to indulge. But mostly it beckons you to venture out into the dark night and into the bright lights of Denton after dark. 