

No Closing Time

Where to find good grub in the wee hours.

By Sara Wachter-Boettcher

Eugene goes to sleep early. By the time the sun sets, most of downtown has already shut down. By 10 or 11 pm, the remaining businesses – restaurants, mostly – have also closed their doors, leaving nothing but a spattering of bars and pubs to light the night.

So when it gets late, when the bars are closing and there's little left to do but go home, where can a hungry Eugenean get a good bite to eat? Sure, a few fast food drive-through windows stay open, and there are always the 24-hour chain diners. But when you're out late and looking for something better than a value menu and less annoying than fighting high school kids for a booth, where can you go?

The Pita Pit

Located right downtown at 1087 Willamette — halfway between an Indigo District barstool and the comfort of my bed — the Pita Pit wins my approval for its sheer convenience, even though it's not technically open all night. Open 24 hours a day until just a couple months ago, when the restaurant stopped offering breakfast and started closing at 3 or 4 am, the Pita Pit serves up pretty much anything you want in a big piece of pita bread. Until around midnight, the shop is a high-traffic area for groups of teenagers. But by 1 or 2 am, the crowd thins out to a few tipsy 20-somethings at a time. You can be out the door, pita in hand, in five minutes flat.

My favorite menu item is the gyros pita, a big mess of lamb-and-beef kebab smothered in tzatziki, a yogurt-and-cucumber based sauce, and topped with feta cheese, lettuce, tomatoes and olives. I stopped in late one night and sampled one. At \$5.25 each, tonight



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Katie Matthews and Dusty Locke scarfing down some nachos at Burrito Boy.

one gyro was enough for two people. But if you're in a gluttonous, drunken stupor, you might want your very own.

Burrito Boy

Perhaps the best-known Mexican joint in town, Burrito Boy has five locations in Eugene. But for the late-night snacker one of them matters: 510 E. Broadway, which started offering 24-hour service back in March. At midday, Burrito Boy is often my first choice for a quick lunch, although during peak times, the restaurant can be crowded and the wait time long. But at night, after the dinner crowd goes home, Burrito Boy is a second home to college freshmen living in one of the UO dorms just a block away. After spending a Saturday evening at a Downtown Lounge hip hop show, we wandered down Broadway in search of some much-needed sustenance.

At 1 am, Burrito Boy was still half full: couples stopping in for to-go orders, a table of students and us. Seeking the answer to whiskey sours on an empty stomach, I ordered the \$4.75 Carne Asada Boy Burrito, one of my favorite items. The burrito, filled with small slices of steak tossed with cilantro and onion, beans, rice and cheese, was freshly made and delicious.

My friends Dusty and Katie shared a \$6 Wet Veggie Burrito, Katie's favorite meal: beans, cheese, lettuce, tomato and sour cream

rolled into a tortilla and slathered with mole. Even late, the food was as good as ever, and so was the service. Twenty minutes later, we were sated and ready to teeter to the Horsehead for one last round.

Muchas Gracias

In the world of 24-hour Eugene eateries, Muchas Gracias is the newest. The restaurant, a St. Helens-based chain with locations across Oregon, opened in May in the old Burger King building at 1535 Franklin Blvd. A bit out

of the way for the downtown crowd, it's within walking distance from the UO's residence halls and other student housing east of campus. And perhaps best of all when you're not on foot, it has a drive-through. On this particular night, I had skipped dinner and Katie had been subsisting on Wheat Thins all day. So we headed out late to try the Muchas Gracias fare.

The first thing I noticed was the price. From tortas (Mexican-style sandwiches) to combination plates to giant burritos, the food is almost as cheap as Taco Bell and the portions are massive. Katie ordered a simple \$2.15 bean and cheese burrito, but I opted for the \$3.30 Oregon Burrito, a mixture of steak, potatoes, cheese and Mexican salsa.

By the time we'd chosen a booth amongst the few other diners, our orders were called. The burritos were huge. But as I bite into my meal, I had my first disappointment in my hands-on research for this story. The steak was under-seasoned, the potatoes were bony and the whole thing was greasier than I'd hoped. On Katie's side of the table, the grease dribbled from her burrito — not what she expected from beans and cheese.

The food isn't actually bad, but it's too greasy, and Burrito Boy's ingredients are better. But then again, a burrito down the street would have cost \$2 more, and sometimes, especially late at night, cheap food wins. I washed down an overall satisfying meal with an orange Fanta and we headed home, content in the knowledge that although Eugene may sleep early, we'll never go to bed hungry again. ■

24-HOUR SCARFING

Many Eugene restaurants are open 24 hours a day. Here's a list of some others not previously mentioned:

- The International House of Pancakes serves its requisite breakfast menu, as well as burgers and fries, 24 hours a day. Its downtown diner at 355 E. Broadway is convenient for locals, and the Springfield location, at 3427 Gateway Blvd., gets freeway traffic.
- Shari's, with four local restaurants, serves plenty of American favorites anytime. In Eugene, visit 35 Division Ave. or 2950 W. 11th. In Springfield, Shari's can be found at 1807 Pioneer Pkwy E. or 900 Beltline Road.
- Denny's, located off I-5 at 3652 Glenwood Blvd. and at 987 Kruse Way in Springfield, serves American diner food and caters to the freeway traffic.
- Jack in the Box has three locations open 24 hours a day, all in Springfield: 4172 Main St., 1805 Pioneer Pkwy E. and 3491 Hutton St.
- McDonald's now has three 24-hour drive-thru windows in case of a late night need to supersize: 5701 Main St. and 3405 Gateway Blvd. in Springfield and 2125 Cubit St. in west Eugene.

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