For Heart Health: Ramen in Little Rock, Arkansas

When you think of food in Little Rock, Arkansas, ramen soup probably isn't what comes to mind. Undoubtedly not authentic ramen based on age-old Japanese recipes. But there you would be wrong.

Visitors to Little Rock seeking an unusual foodie experience should head to the hospital. Yes, you heard that right. As most Little Rockians already know, go to the Arkansas Heart Hospital Cafe for lunch on a Monday, Wednesday, or Friday, or visit the hospital's Food From the Heart food truck for ramen in Little Rock. At either of these locations, you can indulge in a bona fide Japanese delicacy.

Heart Healthy Ramen Soup

A piping hot pork broth glistens a dark brown and provides the base for a small mountain of fresh, firm, textured noodles crowned with a collage of crimson, green, and purple veggies, slightly spicy andouille sausage and delicate crawfish.

“That’s our current selection,” explains Gabriel, one of the lunch servers. The ramen menu changes every one or two months.

A Doctor, a Chef, and Murphy's Cafe

It all began when the, now, owner of the hospital, Dr. Bruce Murphy, revealed his love of ramen to Executive Chef Coby Smith, during renovations that occurred in 2016. Coby then embarked on a ramen-tasting tour through Tokyo, learning everything he could about preparation and returned with a long list of menu ideas.

Dr. Murphy is a legend in his own right when he assembled investors in 2011 to save the hospital from being sold to an out-of-state entity and had to step down from practicing medicine to accomplish it.

The tiny cafeteria, named Murphy’s Cafe, resembles any other starchy-white hospital eating area except for its exceptional ramen, served from 11 a.m. until it runs out for only $6. Ramen “rules” state: 1) only four bowls allowed per person, 2) no additions, 3) no substitutions, 4) extra broth is available for a fee. Grab a bowl and head for a table or a tall stool to enjoy this steamy sensation.

It has become quite the go-to place for those in the know. A short 10-15-minute drive from

downtown, hang a left upon entering through the hospital's main doors at 1701 S. Shackleford Road, in Little Rock's west side. The front desk will happily point you in the right direction.

Focusing on "Food From the Heart"

The café works with local farmers and gardeners in obtaining their produce. Success has extended into the creation of the "Food from the Heart" food truck, which offers heart-healthy food options, including the infamous ramen. Found at food truck hot spots around town, Food from the Heart is currently enjoying residence in The Rail Yard Little Rock. (Check their website for current location and hours.)

The Heart Hospital's No. 1 focus is, of course, their patient's health. Because the ramen brings in many people, it has helped to raise awareness of the excellent work of the hospital and its staff. Programs assist recovering patients with making wise eating choices and developing good meal plans.

With the visionary Dr. Murphy at the helm, the hospital reaches into the community, as well by promoting healthy choices and lifestyles. The Heart Hospital sponsors the yearly Cardiac Classic; a cycling event held the third week in April.

Chef Coby Smith's Heart-Healthy Menus

Coby Smith is continuing to work his magic in new directions. Having recently joined Little Rock's CARTI Cancer Center, located between the Heart Hospital and downtown, Chef Coby is hard at work, creating a menu for the new on-site restaurant, The Hope Bistro. The goal is to not only devise meal recommendations for cancer patients but to combine ingredients known to prevent cancer into fresh dishes that taste great and inspire healthy living. Look out, swanky restaurants. There might be a new trend developing here.

Do Your Heart a Favor in Little Rock

So, the next time you find yourself in Little Rock, do your heart a favor and check out the Arkansas Heart Hospital Café or the Food from the Heart food truck for a bubbling bowl of Asian cuisine; ramen in Little Rock.

For More:

- Arkansas Heart Hospital Cafe

- Arkansas Heart Hospital's annual Cardiac Classic
- The Rail Yard Little Rock
- CARTI Cancer Center
- Little Rock tourism
- Arkansas tourism
- On our site: so more more on Southeastern U.S.

-All photos by Joanne Galko.