

VIRGINIA'S ON KING



restaurant Review

Sometimes we just crave comfort food, and every now and then, we must indulge and enjoy these rich and savory dishes: fried chicken, creamy grits, and savory pork chops. Rich and decadent, this is truly the food of indulgence, and luckily for us here in Charleston, there are many places that excel in creating these hallowed dishes, one of which is steeped in generations' worth of lowcountry culinary techniques. On King Street in downtown Charleston, you will find a delectable southern restaurant full of our cherished comfort food – Virginia's on King.

Located across the street from the majestic St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, there is a little old white building on the

corner of King and Hudson. Its humble stature allows for the quaint building to blend into its surroundings beautifully, but it is characteristically distinguishable by the painting on the Hudson Street side of the building: a black and white silhouette of a woman carrying a plate of food under an oak canopy. The green canopies and gas lanterns by the front door are so quintessentially Charlestonian, that you can't help but be drawn towards the entrance. Enter the building and you will be greeted by a beautiful bistrosque interior, complete with a welcoming bar and a beautiful lowcountry scene painted on the wall. The exposed brick with the old floorboards captures the aura of Charleston so perfectly, you can't help but be drawn into the



Charlie and Pat Davis



Melanie and Jed DeHaven



Southern cuisine in a family style atmosphere



Coosaw residents enjoying an evening out

experience Virginia's aims to provide. Once seated by a friendly member of the hosting staff, you are given your menus, and you then have the opportunity to learn of the restaurant's heritage and muse: Mrs. Virginia Bennett.

Showcased with great reverence is the account of Mrs. Bennett's legacy:

"Our inspiration for this restaurant came from Warren J. and Virginia Bennett. Warren J. was known to most as 'Red' for he had the true look of an Irishman. He and Virginia were both 17 when they were married in 1939. As natives to Charleston, Red and Virginia were raised with the customs of the South. Mrs. Bennett will tell you, as any true southerner will agree, that food and family are the threads that bind the traditions of the South.

Virginia brought up a family of her own, raising four boys and two girls. For years, the Bennett family went to church on Sunday and then came home to Sunday family dinner. Traditionally, southern families joined together in the afternoon for good company, conversation, and the familiar dishes prepared from family recipes, collected and passed down through the years.

Virginia's children grew older and soon had children of their own. As their lives grew to be busier, it became difficult to carry on the longtime Sunday tradition. Nevertheless, Red wanted to keep the children close. Thus began Thursday family dinner, where the Bennett family gathers each week at noon. Coming together on Thursdays allowed most everyone to join."

The first Thursday family dinner was in 1983. Red passed away just a few years later. For years, Virginia has kept the tradition alive in memory of him. She still prepares the home cooked southern fare that for years has graced the dinner table of the Bennett household. Virginia's home is no longer a host to only her children and grandchildren but to family friends as well, and now, you."

Before all else, let's get one thing straight: the must have beverage from Virginia's is no doubt a tall glass of their sweet tea. Virginia's batch is consistently a favorite. It's not overly sweet, nor is it overly bitter. It is just right – cool, refreshing, and a perfect compliment to any of their dishes. After all, sweet tea is the "Table Wine of the South."

Now on to the star of the show: the menu. Virginia's menu is a throwback to traditional southern meals, with their mealtimes being breakfast, brunch, dinner (keep in mind dinner is "lunchtime" down here) and supper. Each menu showcases the best of the south, with dishes such as Shrimp and Grits, Fried Chicken, Country Fried Steak, and many others. The dinner and supper menus are very similar, with a few differences each, such as the sandwich list for dinner and the supper plates for the evening.

Overall, the list is similar in content – hearty, tasty, and traditional southern fare. The list, though extensive, includes several noteworthy selections: Okra Soup, She Crab Soup, Fried Green Tomatoes, Shrimp or Oyster Po' Boy, Southern Fried Chicken, Country Fried Steak, and others. Notable for these menus are the "vegetables and trimmings." Take note: these sides are dangerously tasty and are worthy of being offered as a meal all by themselves (the Farmer's Plate). They include traditional southern sides, such as Carolina Gold Rice, Red Rice and Sausage, Hoppin' John, Squash Casserole, and their famous "Virginia's Baked Macaroni and Cheese."

If you have room after your meal (by some miracle), be sure to check out their dessert menu. The list isn't extensive, but each entry is delicious. Notable are the Pecan Pie and the Key Lime Pie, both of which are the perfect ending to a Virginia's dinner. Here are some reviews from our evening at Virginia's:

"I had the Fried Green Tomatoes to start off the dinner. The presentation was very neat and clean, and the flavors were great. The dressing over the tomatoes contrasted the buttermilk crust, and the tomatoes were cooked perfectly: not too tender, not too firm. For my main course, I ordered the Shrimp and Grits. They were very colorful with the green and red peppers. The dish had the perfect amount of cream in the grits, and the sausage had a great smoky flavor. To finish, I had the Key Lime Pie. The presentation was clean and plentiful. The flavors were tangy and fresh with a sweet buttery graham cracker crust. If I had to choose a favorite dish, I would choose the Fried Green Tomatoes. I liked the contrast in flavors between the crust and the remoulade. When telling others about Virginia's on King, I would tell others that the serving sizes are large and they have great flavors." -SUZY SHANNON

"For my appetizer, I selected the She Crab Soup. I thought the presentation and flavor were excellent, but I think the soup needed a little more sherry. My main course was the Fried Chicken, which was good. For my dessert, I chose the Key Lime Pie, which was very flavorful. This turned out to be my favorite dish of the evening. I very much enjoyed my evening at Virginia's on King." -PAT DAVIS

"The Fried Green Tomatoes were beautifully presented with a drizzle of pepper remoulade, a pepper relish, and arugula. They had a fabulous array of flavors between the tempura batter on the outside and the relish accompaniment. The Shrimp and Grits had a great presentation. It had lots of colors with the peppers, sausage, and shrimp. It was so mouth watering and the grits were truly "melt in your mouth." The Key Lime Pie was simply divine! It had raspberry swirls that were a great contrast to the tart flavor of the key lime filling. Of all the dishes I had, the Shrimp and Grits was my favorite. It was so light and scrumptious. Overall, I think Virginia's on King is first class! It's such a great well-kept Charleston secret!"

-MELANIE DEHAVEN

restaurant Review ...continued

"I had the Fried Green Tomatoes for the appetizer. The dish was four slices of green tomatoes in a light and crispy batter, and it had a nice pepper relish on the side. They were excellent! Like Melanie, I had the Shrimp and Grits, which was very colorful with red, yellow, and green peppers. The dish had large shrimp, creamy grits, sausage slices, and a nice brown gravy. It was very good, with every flavor complimenting the other. For dessert, I had the Pecan Pie. The slice was very large and was served à la mode. It was very nice and not too sweet. What was my favorite dish: the Fried Green Tomatoes, just because I love them. If there were one thing I would tell others about Virginia's on King, it would be that it is an excellent choice for southern cuisine." -JED DEHAVEN

"My starter was the She Crab Soup, which I thought was wonderful in both presentation and flavor. My choice for the main course was the Shrimp and Grits. The portion was huge, but it was also beautiful and very flavorful. My dessert was the Pecan Pie, which was beautifully presented and had great taste. Honestly, I couldn't choose

a favorite dish – it was totally delightful! Overall, Virginia's on King has great food, wonderful service, and huge portions." -TODD KENNEY

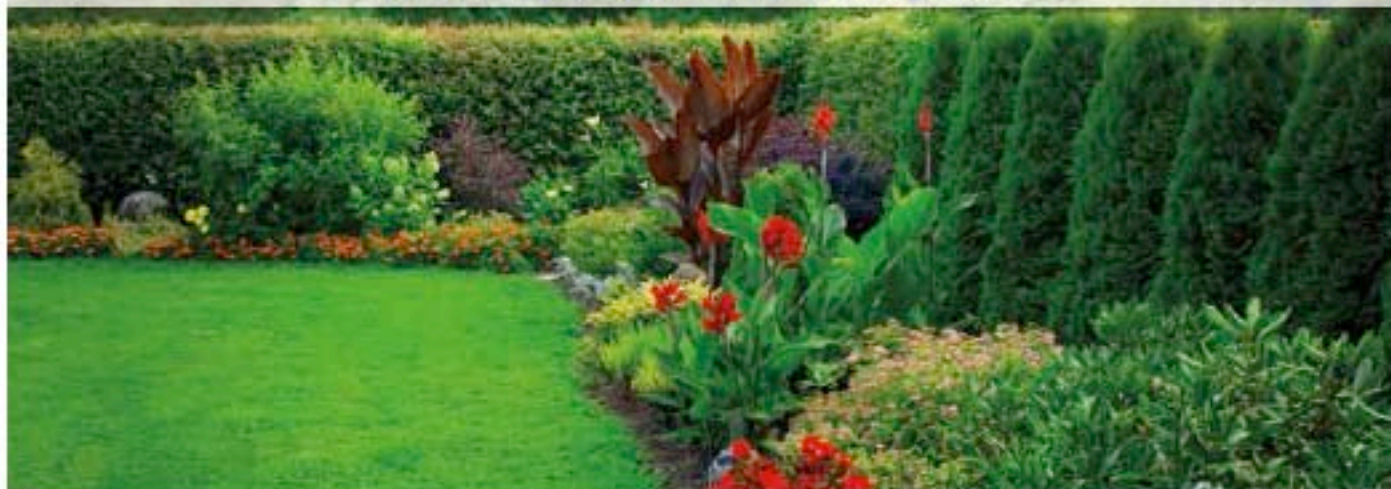
"My appetizer for the evening was the She Crab Soup. The dish was very typically Charlestonian with good flavor and presentation. For my entrée, I selected the Fried Chicken. My dessert choice was the Pecan Pie. The presentation was very good, and it tasted like a typical Pecan Pie. My favorite dish of the evening was the She Crab Soup." - CHARLES DAVIS

When your craving for comfort food begins to get the best of you every now and then, make your way downtown to Virginia's on King to satisfy your craving for good old-fashioned southern dishes. No matter the time of day, a meal at Virginia's is always a good choice. Virginia's on King is located at 412 King Street, or in Charlestonian terms, just north of Calhoun, directly on King. They can be contacted at 843.735.5800.

DISCLAIMER: The business reviewed in this section provided products and/or services free of charge in exchange for this review.



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