

The MassPike Becomes Cheesy Street

Cheesy Street Grill Offers Gourmet Comfort Food at a Comfortable Price

By JANE LEBAK,
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Massachusetts travelers are in for a treat. At two I-90 rest areas, Eastbound in Natick and Westbound in Westborough, standing out from all the millions-served national chains, is the Cheesy Street Grill.

Picture a family trip, everyone impatient to get back to their own beds and tired of franchise food. At the service plaza in Natick, they find a new offering, a place where thick slabs of country white bread and gourmet cheeses are grilled up to order.

It feels like home. It tastes far better.

The kids know exactly what they'll order: one opts for a taco grilled cheese sandwich, while the other is thrilled to find numerous vegetarian offerings and gets a classic grilled cheese with guacamole. Dad just wants something familiar, so he goes with a signature grilled cheese and tomato bisque, but Mom has her eye on the chipotle mac and cheese, customizable with eight different toppings and definitely not like the boxed stuff her mom used to make.

In fact, none of this is like your mother made it — unless your mother was a gourmet chef. (And even then, she probably didn't customize everyone's lunch on the spot.)

Cheesy Street Grill is the creation of Lisa Dowd, Cameron Canzellarini, Geoffrey Howe and Ann Howe.

"It started as a food truck in Connecticut," Dowd said. "I always loved grilled cheese, and I wanted to dress it up. A friend who lives in L.A. told me about L.A.'s grilled cheese food trucks. Those are wildly popular there, and we asked ourselves, *Why*



Cheesy Street Grill Mozzarella, Prosciutto, Roasted Red Peppers with Tarragon Aioli Grilled Cheese Sandwich (Photos/Todd Fairchild Photography of West Hartford, CT)

not here?'

The food truck became a wild success. "Our menu appeals to everyone, from little children just starting to eat, gumming their grilled cheese, all the way to senior citizens," Dowd laughed. "This is my dream pursuit. It feeds the soul."

Grilled cheese has never been so gourmet. Although you can go plain "comfort food" when you want, the more daring diner can select the All Star, a grilled combo of goat cheese, fig jam and red wine caramelized onions. There's a caprese grilled cheese with fresh tomatoes, mozzarella and pesto or balsamic reduction.

You can customize the bread: do you want it gluten-free? Cheesy Street has it, and wheat bread is on the way soon.

The grilled cheese can be paired with a smooth tomato bisque or a creamy cheddar broccoli soup. Or maybe you love mac and cheese . . . but have you ever had it right in the sandwich?



Cheesy Street Grill Chipotle Macaroni & Cheese



Cheesy Street Grill Caprese Grilled Cheese Sandwich

cheese is a blend of asiago, cheddar, and goat cheese. But some people want it all cheddar. Some will ask for it to be 'goatless.' Of course we can do that for them!"

Cheesy Street also makes an effort to reach out to another underserved community: vegetarians.

"I love to tinker with gourmet cooking," Dowd said. "Everything is ours. The mac and cheese is homemade. We prepare the red wine caramelized onions ourselves, 50 pounds at a time."

That flexibility and care for every serving is why they've come up with such lavish combinations and are adding more to the menu all the time. "We're about to roll out a grilled cheese with mozzarella, prosciutto, and roasted red pepper with tarragon aioli. We're also planning a spicy buffalo chicken blue cheese, and of course a ham and Swiss!"

Cheesy Street has plans to expand into breakfasts and signature cold-weather foods like chili. Afterwards, you'll be able to finish off your meal with cookies or maybe even cheesecake.

Lisa Dowd said, "Someday, we'd love to have a storefront location right in Natick, a bar and grill where you can sit down, have a drink and enjoy your favorites."

Cheesy Street Grill is open seven days a week at the Natick Service Plaza (I-90 Eastbound) and Westborough Service Plaza (I-90 Westbound). You can enjoy photos of the grilled cheese creations at their Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/cheesystgrill>. Natick's hungry cheese-lovers may check out the menu at <http://www.cheesystreetgrill.com> and then call in orders for pickup at (617) 401-9660. For a catering order (\$100 minimum), Cheesy Street will even deliver to the surrounding area.

"I love feeding people," Lisa Dowd said. "I'm not happy until people are fed."

When Cheesy Street moved operations into the two service areas, at first it was an uphill climb. "Everyone in America knows D'Angelos and McDonalds," Dowd said, "so Cheesy Street was the underdog." But soon Cheesy Street developed regulars, from commuters to families dropping off college students in Boston to vacationers returning from the Cape.

Because you can access the rest area without entering the highway, many Natick residents are also taking the secret back road from Route 27 into the rest area just to enjoy the homemade mac and cheese or a hand-chopped taco salad. Cheesy Street Grill can also take that road out to you and cater events at local businesses. If it's just yourself, you can call your order ahead and have it waiting.

"Our customers are very supportive, and I have a solid crew," Dowd said. "We can customize everything we make, and people appreciate that. For example, our signature grilled