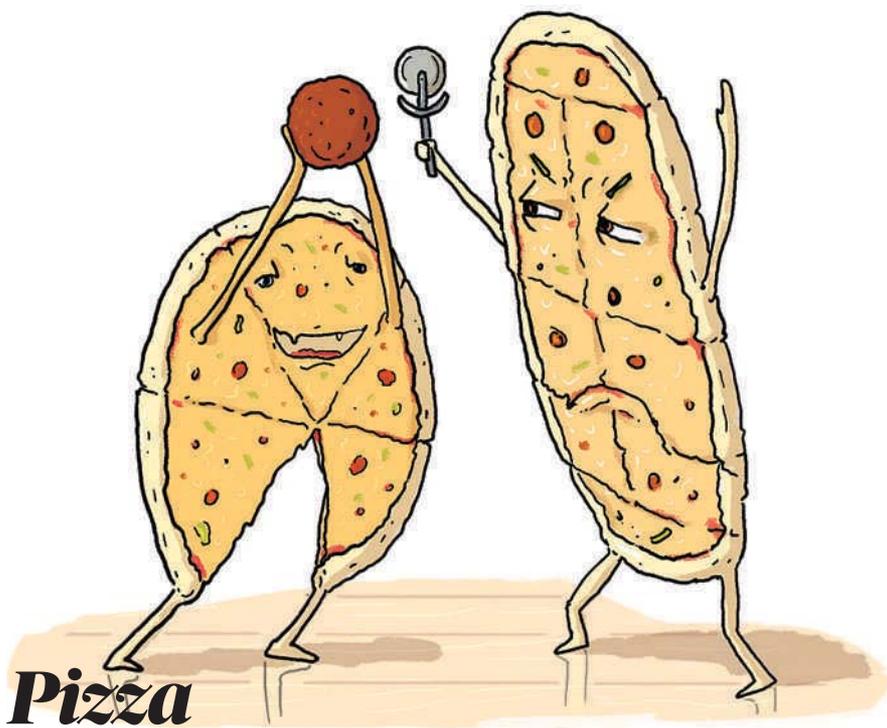


weekendpass

LET'S PLAY FAST CASUAL MADNESS

Vote with your gut, and let the District grub games begin!

Fast-casual restaurants have become one of the District's favorite dining trends, serving up quick meals in bowls, as sandwiches or on pizza dough. But which one is the best? That's where you come in. Express and The Going Out Guide started with a list of 45 fast-casual eateries in eight categories and you helped us narrow down the field to 16, which will now compete in a March Madness-style bracket. First, familiarize yourself with the fast-casual contenders, then head to wapo.st/fastcasual to vote for your picks in the first round of play through Saturday. Voting continues in the round of eight from Sunday to Tuesday, and then the final four face off from March 24 to 26. Finally, the top two restaurants will battle it out from March 31 to April 3. On April 4, we'll reveal the Fast Casual Madness champion. TEXT BY RUDI GREENBERG AND HOLLEY SIMMONS (EXPRESS); ALEX BALDINGER, EMILY CODIK AND BECKY KRISTAL (THE WASHINGTON POST); ILLUSTRATIONS BY LAURENT HRYBYK (FOR EXPRESS)



Pizza

SpinFire
spinfirepizza.com

Things you can do in 90 seconds: Score a touchdown and make a pizza at SpinFire. Coincidentally, Pierre Garcon has done both. The Washington Redskins wide receiver is a founding partner at this build-your-own pizza spot founded in Ashburn, Va., with a second location now open in Rosslyn. Choose from 30-plus fresh toppings including Sriracha sausage and banana peppers.

NO. OF AREA LOCATIONS: 2

MOST VALUABLE DISH: The Veg Out, topped with red sauce, mozzarella, red onions, roasted red peppers, artichokes and black olives.

YEAR OPENED: 2014

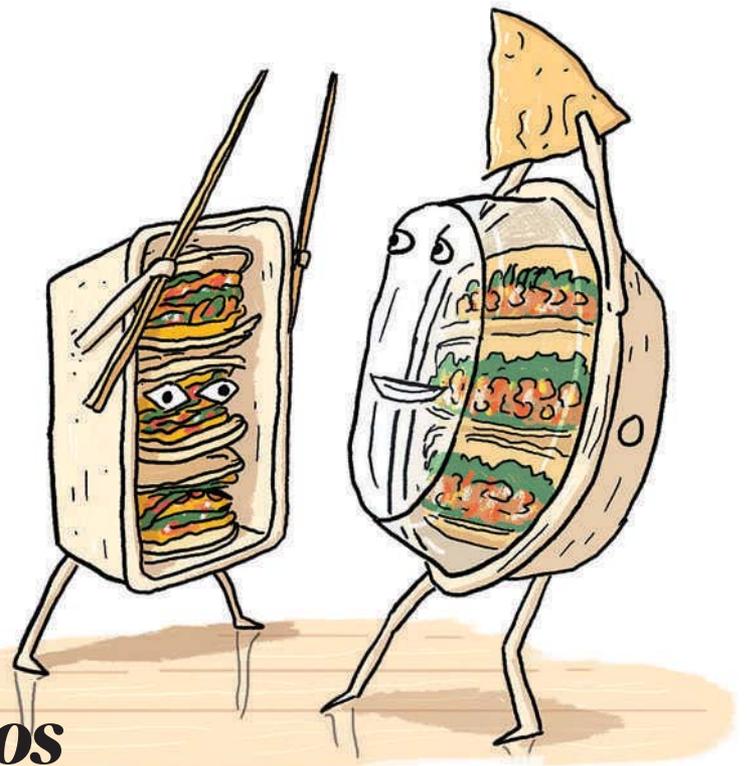
&pizza
andpizza.com

Perhaps this local chain is so adored because it caters to just about every individual taste, diet and craving. We're talking gluten-free crust, dessert pizzas and salads (although we can't attest to how the latter taste because we can never resist the pies). Build your pizza from the crust up, or opt for one of the signature pies or the occasional special, like the hamburger-topped pie or the Reuben pizza.

NO. OF AREA LOCATIONS: 14

MOST VALUABLE DISH: The Maverick, a meat lover's dream made with tomato sauce, mozzarella, salami, pepperoni, Italian sausage and Parmesan.

YEAR OPENED: 2012



Tacos

TaKorean
takorean.com

TaKorean made the transition from mobile vendor to brick-and-mortar shop. It fuses Latin American and Korean fare in a build-your-own-format: Diners choose a protein (chicken, steak, pork, tofu or vegetable) to go in their corn — no flour! — tortillas (or rice or slaw bowls) and then go crazy topping them. Feel free to stick with one slaw (kimchi, romaine or kale), but you'd be foolish not to add all the toppings: salsa roja, Sriracha sauce, lime crema, sesame seeds and cilantro.

NO. OF AREA LOCATIONS: 3

MOST VALUABLE DISH: Caramelized tofu tacos with kimchi and all the toppings.

YEAR OPENED: 2010

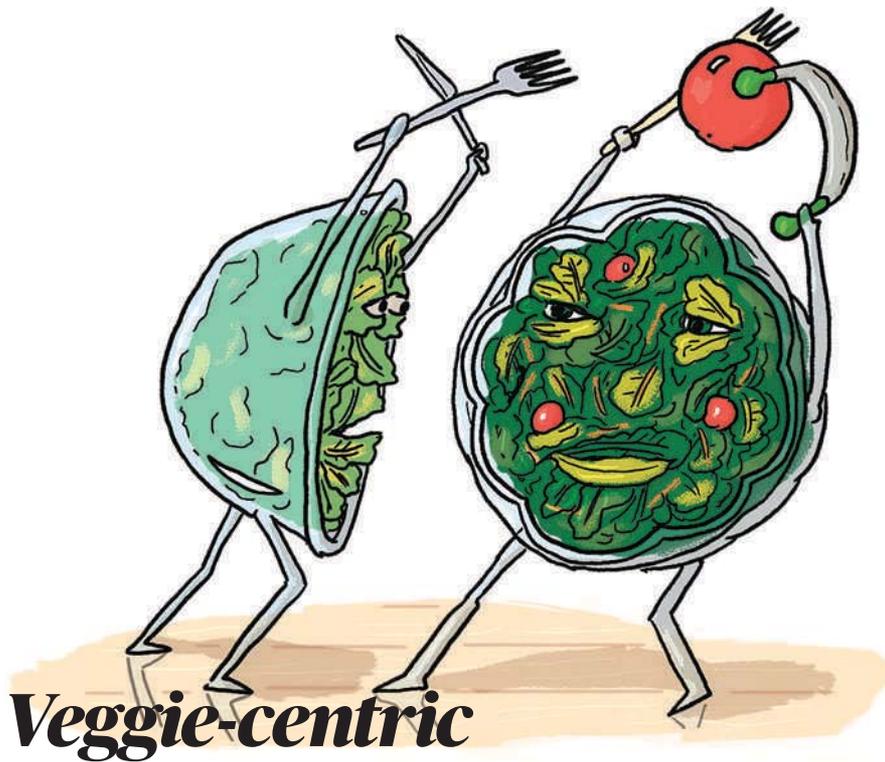
District Taco
districttaco.com

What started as a modest taco cart has now become a recognizable local chain serving tacos for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Tortillas (flour or corn) are customized with such fillings as pork, shredded beef and grilled chicken, as well as toppings including beans, pico de gallo and a variety of salsas. Tacos not your thing? There are also burritos, bowls, salads, quesadillas and nachos.

NO. OF AREA LOCATIONS: 7

MOST VALUABLE DISH: Breakfast tacos, served all day, in basic (eggs, cheese, potatoes), healthy (egg whites) or veggie varieties.

YEAR OPENED: 2009



Veggie-centric

Sweetgreen

sweetgreen.com

This homegrown chain, founded by a trio of Georgetown grads, had humble beginnings when it debuted its straight-from-the-farm salads in a tiny, green-roofed shack on M Street. It's since blossomed to 40-plus shops across the country — as far away as Los Angeles. Bragging that ingredients like baby spinach, apples and cucumbers are "local" and "seasonal" may induce eye rolls today, but back in 2007 the concept was fairly novel.

NO. OF AREA LOCATIONS: 21

MOST VALUABLE DISH: Guacamole Greens, a lime-y delight served with tortilla chips, chicken, avocados and a jalapeno vinaigrette.

YEAR OPENED: 2007

Chopt

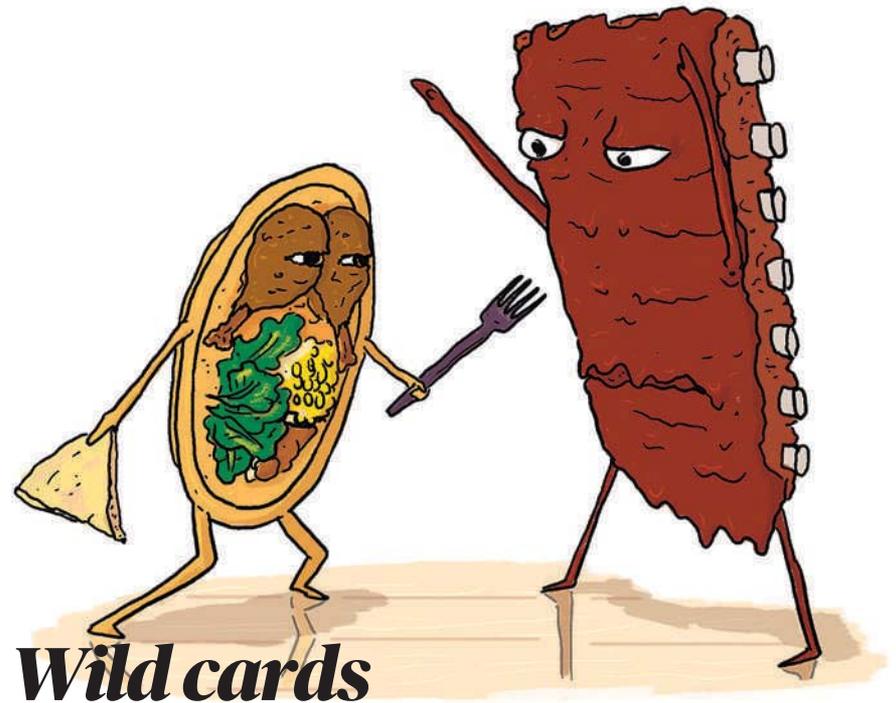
choptsalad.com

Chewing is so overrated. That's why Chopt rocks a blade over all of its produce — chopping it into tiny pieces — before piling it in a bowl and sending you on your way. Founded by two buddies who believed they could make healthy food delicious, Chopt features a menu with gourmet ingredients like gold and purple beets, millet and panko-fried chicken.

NO. OF AREA LOCATIONS: 14

MOST VALUABLE DISH: The Mexican Caesar, made with romaine lettuce topped with cotija cheese, jalapeno peppers, tortilla chips and Mexican Caesar dressing.

YEAR OPENED: 2001



Wild cards

Chix

chixdc.com

You won't find any fried chicken at Chix, and you won't miss it. With three flavor blends (Chix original, Colombian and Peruvian), this eco-friendly local outlet packs more flavor into its rotisserie chicken than even deep-fried birds dusted with secretive blends of herbs and spices. The sides are no slouch either, especially the guacamole and the black bean hummus, both of which come with warm pita.

NO. OF AREA LOCATIONS: 2

MOST VALUABLE DISH: Peruvian half chicken with black beans and rice, noodles and cheese, and curry-mustard sauce.

YEAR OPENED: 2007

Urban Bar-B-Que Company

urbanbbqco.com

Come for the 'cue, stay for the artery-arresting specialties such as the Redneck Fondue (three-cheese dip mixed with chili) and Soul Rolls (egg rolls stuffed with meat, onions, cheese and a side of Redneck Fondue for dipping). When it comes to meats cooked low and slow, the pulled pork is the pick here. Don't forget to grab a hunk of cornbread and to load up on their house barbecue sauces.

NO. OF AREA LOCATIONS: 9

MOST VALUABLE DISH: Pulled pork plate served with coleslaw, house-cut fries and cornbread.

YEAR OPENED: 2003



Asian

Buredo

eatburedo.com

Leave your skepticism at home. Buredo's burrito-sized sushi rolls (stay with us ...) are so wrong they're right, and are a convenient way to satisfy your hunger for quality fish and fresh vegetables. Equivalent to about two or three normal sushi rolls, a Buredo roll is a perfectly proportioned mix of protein, rice, sauces and other Japanese toppings. One major plus: No chopsticks needed.

NO. OF AREA LOCATIONS: 1

MOST VALUABLE DISH: The Sofie, made with shrimp tempura, avocado, pickled cabbage, carrot, sesame seeds, red tobiko and Sriracha mayo.

YEAR OPENED: 2015

ShopHouse

shophousekitchen.com

You know the drill: Choose your grain base (or a salad), a meat, some vegetables, a sauce and a garnish. Though the process is formulaic, ShopHouse's menu is anything but. Meats pop with Southeast Asian ingredients, including lemongrass, fish sauce and coconut. Tangy sauces such as spicy red curry and tamarind vinaigrette compete for your attention.

NO. OF AREA LOCATIONS: 7

MOST VALUABLE DISH: The steak laab rubbed in dry spices and grilled with fish sauce and lime, which can be added to any combination of rice, vegetables, sauce and garnish.

YEAR OPENED: 2011

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