



# ★ GOOD EATS ★ Special Report

## A jaunt around to York's many coffee shops

Photos by Herman Surkis

By HARRY STINSON  
Home of the staple York beverage, patron of the entertainment scene, the campus coffee shops are the most frequented spots at York.

Generally coffee shops are for the most part college-sponsored and offer two functions: they give quick take-out orders, and serve as gathering places for people to sit and talk at length. The shops may not serve food on any grander scale than chips or donuts. Largely student-run, they represent some challenge to the food service monopoly, but Versafood doesn't consider them any threat.

### Versafood thinks they're great

All of this suits Versafood just fine, as they are not primarily in the between-classes, on-the-run business, and students sprawling interminably about the serveries would render attempts at clean-up near impossible. Besides, Versafood sells sandwiches to one of them, bagels to another, and cream and milk to all of them on occasion; anything they need to tide them over shortages is provided at cost.

Most coffee shops do a booming trade during class breaks, and brace themselves for the lunch-hour surge. Nights are a different question altogether, depending on the different coffee shops, hours, licence status, and entertainment policy.

In the face of product restrictions, the coffee shops have gravitated toward a relatively standard selection. Coffee of course, donuts, chips, candy bars (the variety depending on the shop), milk, juice, nuts, and pop make up the core. The majority also have yoghurt and fruit nectar. Several stock a variety of unusual-flavored teas. Absinthe offers five flavors, Stong - six, and Lichen at College G, 15.

The bagels at Stong are hot but have ancestral roots in Versafood. The sandwiches available at College G are again courtesy Versafood, but rumor has it that one of the more popular hang-outs on campus is making its own, with ingredients from Charlie C's, and the Open Window Bakery.

### Would like to serve more food

With the exception of the juice and yoghurt, it doesn't represent a very nutritious fare. Don Hussey of McLaughlin's Argh frustratedly muses that it would be a good thing for the coffee shops to serve more real food, but he knows that the chances of this are rather slim. And one suspects that the coffee shops do not realize what they'd be getting in for should they try and make the move into this area.

The only real coffee shop on campus that can serve substantial and legitimate food is the Versafood Buttery. In addition the items available at the other shops, they feature the big volume hamburger/hot dog/French fries line,

plus milkshakes, fish-(haddock and lox)-on-a-bun, tinned soups and stews, and cream cheese. Although purportedly the fastest place to eat on campus, this is probably because of the Buttery's dwindling turn-over.

Most of their customers come to plant themselves at the tables for long periods, which makes clean-up difficult. Indeed the Buttery is fast acquiring a firm reputation for its filth, but Food Complex No. One manager Rick Carson pins the blame "100 percent on the students themselves". He makes the customary allusions to the availability of trash cans, but assures that behind-the-counter cleanliness is easy.

Versafood may recommend to overload ancillary services concerning decor and other changes, but the feeling seems to be that the warm, non-dining room atmosphere serves as an adequate attraction for the present. Nevertheless, little enthusiasm awakens for the provision of a similar meeting place in Complex No. Two. Likewise, for reasons of lack of need and space—the French Café is already located in a music room.

### Central Square is the spot

Central Square is not intentionally a coffee shop. But as a cash-only, non-dining hall plagued with lingerers whom staff are reluctant to press to leave due to lack of staff time, and public relations, it is hard to avoid the categorization of coffee shop. Indeed their high volume is concentrated in sandwiches, 900 per day as compared with 210 hot meals. The mini-del provides hot steamed sandwiches on rye or a bun, hot dogs, pickles and pickled eggs, and the mobile sandwich cart introduced outside the Scott Library in November may be expanded to include hot items. Their other attractions, the pizza pit and the fish counter, do a similarly thriving business.

More staff and administration people eat at Central Square than anywhere else on campus, but they are a unanimously uncomplaining lot; all the grumbling emanates from students. But the new manager prefers the crush of Central Square, with its seating capacity 10 percent of lunch time volume of 1,200-1,500, to her former haunts at Complex No. One, chiefly because of the different class of clientele. They are a change from the institutionalized, gastronomically bored residents, who, she claims "took out their complaints on administration and food services."

The exact genre of Osgoode's locker room-cum-food outlet is uncertain. Improvised in the summer of '69 when it became evident that the university centre building would not be soon in the offing with its cafeteria facilities originally planned to serve Osgoode, the present setup is unsuitable in

design. Overcrowding, (there are 900 people in the building) inefficiency, (it is not uncommon for the food to run out), and general lack of cleanliness result. Inadequate service hook-ups have so far hindered expansion beyond sandwiches, hot dogs, soups, coffee, tea, milk, cakes and a mini-del: No hot entrée is served.

Osgoode staff are annoyed by the hours (early closing and no service during student holidays) and plead for access to food from the faculty common rooms at these times. Everyone is disgusted by the garbage, with the finger alternately pointed at lazy inconsiderate students, a resigned and passive Versafood staff, an awkward design, and just plain congestion.

Meanwhile, the colleges have set up their own coffee shops. Initially each received grants or loans for furnishings, equipment and advance stock purchases. In some cases they were required to pay the funds back gradually. This investment ranged from a practically token \$300 for the skeleton trappings of George, through a more reasonable \$1,000 at College G, to a comparatively thorough \$8,000 treatment at Stong's Orange Snail (\$4,000 to start from scratch with a blank room, \$3,000 for more recent expansion and a further \$1,000 budgetted for future growth).

Both of these were direct grants, as was the case with Vanier's Open End and Calumet (\$1,200). Founder's Cock and Bull and McLaughlin's Argh both work on a lean basis but are relatively free of debt right now. Absinthe in Winters admits that some debts are still hovering about their heads, including one originally incurred for furniture.

### Councils are the bosses

In all cases, the ultimate responsibility rests with the college councils. Coffeehouse books are inspected at least once a year formally (in some cases more often) and must be audited for certain councils. Although Bob Thompson of Founders hedges and warns of possible legal recovery action should the circumstances and amount warrant it, in the end any debts incurred by coffee shops fall back upon their respective patron student councils. Some (Founders, Winters and Vanier for example,) provide contingency funds to tide their protégées over difficult periods. And in the case of the Cock and Bull fire last year, damages of \$1,000 were covered by the council.

Council control is most effectively manifested in the annual selection of managers, usually based on the predecessor's recommendations and open application procedures. At Stong, the services committee oversees the operation at Founders, the coffee shop and discothèque

committee is in charge. Ainger reports to Calumet's general meetings and Vanier's coffee house society has the college secretary as president.

### Shops employ many people

The managers are paid by the councils (except at Stong where it's an honorarium), and other staff salaries come from receipts. At Stong, this involves 22 people, Argh employs 30, Cock and Bull about 20 (excluding 3 managers), Calumet, 20, College G, 14, Absinthe, eight (with a full-time girl during the day), and George has one full-time and five relief people.

That's a lot of people, but the coffee shops evidently feel that they can justify them. In many cases it's an unresolved argument as to whether a coffee shop should be primarily a business or a service to the college.

Turnover varies widely across the campus. Stong pegs theirs at 500 to 600 over 12 hours (with 100 of those from Atkinson); Calumet talks of 240; the Cock and Bull, 200 to 300 at the beginning of the week, rising to 300 to 400 Wednesday to Friday. The others are more vague.

The crunch comes when it gets down to dollars and cents. George is breaking even or turning a small profit at \$225 to \$250 a week. But the cash balance is not even a week ahead of expenses. Calumet has a \$50 take per day, College G claims \$130 per day, Vanier cites \$85 per day, the Cock and Bull, \$130 to \$200, rising to \$400 on pub night, Argh estimates a weekly gross of \$400. Winters would rather not publish their figures, though suffice to say they are not at either extreme, especially the top extreme. Stong again seeks to astonish with its claim of \$150 per day.

Given these figures, Calumet, hampered by an \$1,800 debt run up through too much initial effort at being a College service, is now turning a profit. They raised their prices to more practical levels, and despite a few complaints, volume has apparently not suffered.

Vanier is self-supporting, channeling the profits back into the next year's reopening. Any College G profit, reputedly \$600 per month is the property of the council, but is deposited in a separate bank account, to which the coffee shop has access.

Founders plows a healthy profit right back into their Cock and Bull operation, Argh profits are first applied to a depreciation fund to replace stereo equipment and other needs. The remainder reverts to the college council, which formally runs the funds. Stong maintains they are indeed doing well this year.

With the considerable resources involved in these operations, theft inevitably becomes a problem. George cut a rip-off rate of eight percent to one to two percent by installing a large, latched cupboard. A stereo, so new it wasn't yet insured was lifted from the Cock and Bull before Christmas. Otherwise, Founders professes that it trusts its staff and has no other problems.

An open ceiling into the College G storeroom caused heavy losses until stocks were shifted to the already overcrowded kitchen. Similar circumstances surrounded the theft of College F's sound system when they were there last year. Ian DesLaurier, one of the three Open End managers, confides that they get paranoid at this time of year about desperate students and keep an extra close watch on valuable equipment, particularly their sound system.

The primary worry of course, is packing them in. Winters waxes enthusiastic about its Friday night volunteer-performer coffee house set-up. While admitting that their license was probably the drawing card at first (an eminently valid assumption), the combination of lines of people waiting to get in, a record of 35 acts of all kinds in 10 weeks, the prospect of a local group cutting an album there shortly, a waiting list of 50 entertainers and the discovery and subsequent booking by Simbar Productions of an act at Absinthe, has moved the manager to make comparisons with Grumbles and The Riverboat.

### The glory of Friday night

From these exalted heights, he urges more co-operation so that York coffee-houses as a group might offer effective competition to downtown. Absinthe's daytime stagnation is forgotten in the glory of Friday night.

Friday and Saturday, the Open End follows a similar all-volunteer format. Sometimes the pace may drag, but on the whole they're very pleased with the troupe of singers, poets, actors, and comedians. A clique of poets that regularly haunts the shop offers a generally impressive Poets' Night. The Coffee House Theatre Group (of Vanier students) has already offered a quite successful performance of Under Milkwood, and special arrangements have already been made for Vanier's Reading Week chess tournament. Without any entertainment costs, they feel no need for a license, and are left with considerably greater leeway

financially for special occasions. Founders relies on having the only discothèque on campus, live folksinger entertainment every two weeks, and the decor and atmosphere of York's best-known, most-open pub.

Calumet found Friday night entertainment too expensive at the beginning of the year, but they plan to give it another whirl with cheaper local bands. This, plus what they believe to be unique Olde English decor, and reputedly the best coffee at York, will, they hope, attract more people.

Argh's present drawing cards are cassette machines, CHUM-FM, and Don Cole's original "sophisticated and spacious design." There is no set entertainment policy. Two singers came before Christmas, a group on Tuesday, (all covered by receipts although there is a fund available), and college students do their thing. They have their eyes on a license for carnival time, and they hope to extend it to future Tuesday nights when there is no competition with other coffee shops.

Recent Stong expansion converted a social debates room, thus doubling their seating capacity and adding pinball, shuffleboard, and a color tv. Singers on Friday and Saturday nights, both otherwise successful pub nights, proved financially unworkable, so they now rely on Friday entertainment alone and spillover from Stong College dances. An improvements questionnaire is now underway.

Despite severely limiting power difficulties, (manager John Francis is wary of extension cords since they caused the Founders' fire), College G coffee shop tries to peddle a maximum selection. A soup machine is next. There are no elaborate physical improvement plans as the college will be moving within a year. And due to the commuter status of its clientele, there are no entertainment programs like the others. The coffee shop is closed weekends.

Francis' other charge, George, has a collection of raucous pinball machines, and a free phone situated inexplicably directly beneath a Radio York loudspeaker. Despite Mike Fletcher's grandiose sidewalk cafe schemes, the CYSF coffee shop has few pretensions that it is anything else but a small-scale convenience take-out desk. Its hours are thus a realistic 8:30 am to 5 pm daily.

### Cup problem at Open End

Although managers of College coffee shops give the impression of having succumbed to the insidious malady of regarding complaints at their coffee shop to be infrequent and minor occurrences, York might take note of one development at Open End. Evidently some people have taken to toting their own coffee mugs in to be filled. The reason? All those styrofoam cups, they say, are polluting the campus.



Argh in Mac



Open End, the Vanier Coffee Shop



Lichen, the College G Coffee Shop in Steacie Library

Founders' Cock & Bull