

A FORK ON THE ROAD

Get off to a good start
at the Muffin TinLINDA
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If Norman Rockwell had grown up in South Florida and had a thing for muffins, he would have created The Muffin Tin. This homey place in Pinecrest with a folksy mural of frolicking cows serves up quintessential breakfast fare daily with a ray of sunshine.



That's provided by owner and manager Mary Mabeesh, who's at the register daily, greeting regulars and newcomers with equal enthusiasm, even after 16 years. Born Haifa, Israel, she grew up in Milwaukee and came to Miami in 1991, buying the then-10-year-old restaurant with her husband.

Locals come for eggs, egg sandwiches, omelets, breakfast burritos, cinnamon nut French toast, Belgian waffles and pancakes with sides of bacon, sausage, ham, corned beef hash, potatoes, grits, biscuits and sausage gravy and, of course, fresh-baked muffins in a plethora of flavors.

Head cook Mary Antoine Claire helps bake them from scratch each morning in tins blackened from use. The recipes the two Marys have developed over the years include blueberry, banana nut, raisin bran, orange cranberry, lemon poppy, corn, chocolate chip and, during the holidays, pumpkin. Bite-size mini muffins can be special ordered.

At lunchtime, the soup might be lentil, French onion, beef barley, chicken vegetable, broccoli with feta cheese or split pea with bacon. Sandwiches include the standards, from BTL to roast beef, plus the Rachel, a Reuben minus the sauerkraut.

Hot platters are straight from any classic diner: liver and onions, hot open-face turkey sandwich, pork chops, country-fried steak, etc. Ladies who lunch go for the chef salad or the

taco salad with chili, cheese, onion, tomato and sour cream on a bed of lettuce with nacho chips.

Weekends are big on pancakes — the thick, light, fluffy variety. Best are the not-too-sweet, hot-but-not-flaming Bananas Foster hot cakes topped with banana slices and a mixture of brown sugar and chopped walnuts.

Mary Mabeesh came up with the Muffin Tin's signature French toast, with cinnamon and ground nuts stirred into the eggy mixture that coats the spongy bread slices. Belgian waffles are thick and crispy, topped with eggs and bacon, sausage or Canadian bacon.

Breakfast is always available, served with a beaming smile. Not a bad way to start the day, whatever time it may be.

Linda Bladholm's latest book is Latin and Caribbean Grocery Stores Demystified.

■ **Place:** The Muffin Tin Restaurant.

■ **Address:** 12655 S. Dixie Hwy. (in the South Park Center), Pinecrest.

■ **Contact:** 305-235-9020, themuffintin.us.

■ **Hours:** 6:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. daily.

■ **Prices:** Muffins \$2.05 each; eggs \$3.75-\$6.95; pancakes, French toast and waffles \$4.15-\$8.95; sandwiches \$4.25-\$8.25; salads \$3.45-\$8.65; platters \$8.45-\$10.95.



LINDA BLADHOLM/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

PINECREST: Mary Mabeesh presents a tray of her signature treats. Also pictured are the Muffin Tin's French toast with cinnamon and walnuts and pancakes with bananas, brown sugar and nuts.

BREAKFAST PUMPKIN WAFFLES

Serve with butter and real maple syrup.

- 2¼ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 large eggs
- 1½ cups canned pumpkin puree (not pie mix)
- 6 tablespoons (¾ stick) unsalted butter
- 2 teaspoons freshly grated orange zest

Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Oil and heat an electric waffle iron according to manufacturer's instructions. Sift the flour with the sugar, baking powder and salt into a

bowl. In another bowl, beat the eggs, then beat in the pumpkin and butter. Resift the flour mixture over the pumpkin mixture. Add the zest, and fold until the batter is just combined.

Bake a waffle in the hot iron, using about 1 cup batter. Transfer to an ungreased baking sheet while you make the rest. Crisp the waffles in one layer in the oven for 5 minutes before serving. Makes 6 (8-inch) waffles.

Source: *Gourmet's America* (Random, 1994).

Per waffle: 458 calories (30 percent from fat), 15.5 g fat (8 g saturated), 4.5 g monounsaturated), 173 mg cholesterol, 9.6 g protein, 72 g carbohydrates, 7 g fiber, 1,500 mg sodium.



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A sweet potato muffin recipe
is at MiamiHerald.com/Food.