

FOOD & DINING

I tried this old school Phoenix deli's top sandwiches. See my ranking

Welcome to First Bite, The Arizona Republic's guide to can't-miss dishes at restaurants that are new — or new to us.



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Cheese 'n Stuff is an Uptown Phoenix sandwich shop that opened in 1949. It was most recently run by the Zawatski family and [closed in April 2025](#) when Stan Zawatski decided to retire. In June 2025, Julie and Tom Palmer and a group of their friends purchased it to keep the historic legacy alive.

Almost a year later, I decided it was time to pay them a visit and try their five top-selling sandwiches.

Co-owner Julie Palmer, who grew up eating at Cheese 'n Stuff, gave me a tour of the tiny space. While trying to maintain its spirit, she has upgraded a few things — she replaced the rundown tables and chairs with high chairs and tables; designed a photo wall behind the counter that includes photos of the previous owner along with high school and college pennants; and added a patio space to the back of the shop with baby blue, red and black tables and chairs.

While Palmer has kept the suppliers the same, she's improved the quality of a few items, like the potato and pasta salads, which are now made in-house.

"Everything is fresh, everything is sliced in the morning," she said.

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Improved sides are a good thing, but the star of the show has always been the sandwiches, which range in price from \$9.95-\$13.99 and are still served in red baskets lined with red and white checkered paper.

I tried the five most popular options. Here's how they stack up.

5. Cactus Jack

Cactus Jack, the second most popular sandwich at the shop, is a turkey and salami sandwich with pepper jack cheese, mayo, lettuce and tomatoes all tucked inside a sub roll made by Venezia Bakery.

My dining companion described it best when she called it a grown-up turkey sandwich. Fluffy roll, savory meat and a little zing from the cheese. That's it. No pomp and circumstance. The tomatoes held their own and never flopped and the meat was not overly salty. Solid choice.

4. Doughboy

The top seller has history. According to Palmer, "the sandwich used to be sold at Markgraf pharmacy. When they went out of business in the '80s, Stan asked the owner if he could take it over and start offering it."

It's made with turkey, bacon, Swiss cheese, avocado and mayo on sourdough. The whole thing goes into the microwave briefly to melt the cheese and soften the bread. The result is a warm bite of fresh bread, a smoky flavor from the bacon, a quiet savory from the turkey with cheese and avocado in supporting roles.

3. New Yorker

Between two pieces of rye toast, folded layers of ham, turkey and corned beef are stacked atop each other like blocks and topped with lettuce and tomato slices for a vertically impressive sandwich. There is no dressing and no need for it. The tomatoes do just fine. This is an umami bomb punctuated by the caraway seeds, whose deep sharpness dizzied me with excitement every time I got a hit. It's a hearty cold sandwich, perfect for Arizona weather.

2. Italian

The Italian features slices of ham and hard salami with pleats of mortadella topped with provolone, Italian dressing, lettuce and tomato on a sub roll. The tender bread gave way to lovely layers that went from full-bodied salami to silky mortadella with its porky and nutty taste. The Italian dressing, reminiscent of giardiniera, but in liquid form, added just the right tang. My companion said she'd want this sandwich after a long day in the sun. I'll take it after a long day at work.

1. Tyler

That this sandwich made No.1 on my list surprised me. It's simply a turkey sandwich, but a perfectly balanced one. Served on a tender sandwich roll, savory turkey is deepened by the funk of Muenster cheese, which played well with the spice from the mustard and brine from the pepperoncini. The whole bite was lifted by the added

freshness of the crispy lettuce and tomato and soft avocado. Tyler felt exactly right for the Arizona heat and is the one I'll come back for.

Come for your favorite, stay for the variety

I've tried the top five, but I'm not done yet. There are 26 more sandwiches for me to try just to get through the menu. Then comes the customization options.

Cheese n' Stuff is truly a place to go to "get a taste of old Phoenix, along with a side of New York." For sandwich lovers, decades later, it's still a must-try.

Visit Cheese 'n Stuff

Palmer said she's trying to expand the offering to include specialty cheeses and charcuterie boards. But there's plenty on the menu right now worth going for.

Don't miss: The top five bestsellers.

Ambiance: Casual.

Noise level: Easy to hear conversations.

Dress code: Casual.

Prices: \$9.95-\$13.99 for sandwiches, 99 cents-\$12 for sides, \$1.99-\$3.49 for drinks.

Restaurant hours: 9 a.m.- 4 p.m. Monday to Friday; 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday; closed on Sunday.

Reservations: None.

Parking: Free parking is available to the right of the restaurant.

Details: 5042 N. Central Ave., Phoenix. 602-266-3636, cheesenstuffdeli.com.

Reach the reporter at BAnooshahr@azcentral.com. Follow [@baharcreative](https://www.instagram.com/baharcreative) on Instagram.

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