

Cowbells & Communion

Fall weekends in Starkville,
where tradition finds
its second wind

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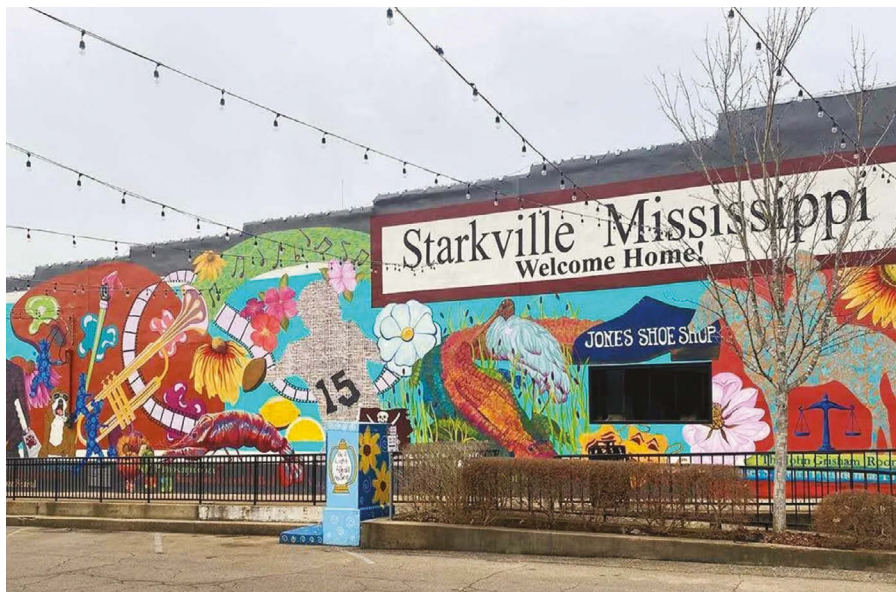


ON FALL SATURDAYS IN STARKVILLE, THE PACE SEEMS TO SHIFT. The air finally carries a hint of cool, the kind that signals summer's end. Inevitably, somewhere across the Junction, a cowbell rings—sharp and familiar—marking the start of more than just a football game. It's the beginning of a tradition.

In Mississippi's College Town, game day isn't a spectacle; it's a gathering. It's communion of neighbors, classmates, family, and total strangers, folding lawn chairs into a tight circle and sharing deviled eggs from a Tupperware that's older than the freshmen in the student section. The tradition is thick here, from the script on a faded Bulldog hoodie to the way folks still pause when the Famous Maroon Band begins to warm up. But lately, that tradition has been meeting a new kind of energy, and the combination feels just right.

All across Starkville, what's old is new again. You can feel it in the repurposed spaces, the rhythm of Main Street, and the way the town's staples are being seen with fresh eyes. Longtime locals will tell you it still feels like home. It just got better.

The retro-inspired Far Out Motel, a classic roadside inn, has been reimagined as a nostalgic, art-forward stay that nods to its roots without getting stuck in them. The rooms are simple, yet stylish, with curated vintage furnishings, and plenty of stories on the walls (including one about Johnny Cash and Room 22). It's not slick. It's soulful. And it fits Starkville perfectly.



Just a stone's throw from MSU, the retro-inspired Far Out Motel offers charm and convenience, with contactless entry for a seamless stay. Plus, Starkville's best dining and nightlife are right at your doorstep.



The Cotton District is a vibrant part of Starkville, home to many restaurants, bars, and shops. Since 2005, Bin 612 has been an anchor of the area, popular with students and game-day travelers alike.



A nod to its treasured past: The Landing, with its vibrant rooftop bar, is creating new experiences for the future.

"We saw the magic the moment we laid eyes on it," says Augustine Tran, owner and manager of Far Out. "The bones were solid, the layout was classic, and the location was perfect. It felt like a place that deserved a second life."

The motel, once known as the University Motel, had stories embedded in its walls, including one that ties it to country music royalty. "In 1965, Johnny Cash was in Starkville for a show at Mississippi State," Tran explains. "Afterward, he was arrested for public drunkenness, allegedly for picking flowers in someone's yard, and he was staying right here at what's now the Far Out Motel. That moment inspired his song 'Starkville City Jail.' So yes, our little motel is part of music history."

That layered sense of past and present is evident in every room. Guests check in to curated vintage furniture, old-school color palettes, and subtle nods to mid-century charm. "People light up when they see the vintage touches," says Tran. "It feels like stepping into a time capsule,

but with modern comforts."

And beyond the aesthetics, it's about how the space makes you feel. "We want guests to feel like they've stumbled into a hidden gem," Tran adds. "Whether they're crashing for a night or staying the weekend, it's a playful escape. A place to unplug, unwind, and maybe even spark a little creativity."

That same idea pulses through Starkville's bar and restaurant scene, which has quietly become one of the town's biggest draws for game day visitors and locals alike.

For Bulldogs of a certain age, memories of The Landing harken back, full of 80s nostalgia. Now, golden-hour light hits the rooftop of The Landing just right. You can hear the distant hum of the crowd from Davis Wade Stadium, smell the tailgate grill-smoke wafting up from below, and see the flicker of stadium lights over the treetops.

"We wanted it to be a place where friends and family can come and enjoy each other's company and have fun together," says co-owner Ken Ezelle, an MSU alum.

"It always had a special place in our hearts. For all of us in the ownership group, it was always going to be called The Landing."

Though the name goes back decades, the space is all fresh energy now, think panoramic views, cold drinks, and a crowd that spans generations. "Students seem so excited they have something they can stick their chest out about, like, 'We have one of the premier new bars in the SEC,'" says Ezelle.

There's a bit of nervous anticipation, too. "We're excited about football, but we're also a little nervous," Ezelle admits with a laugh. "We know it's going to be a madhouse on the weekends."

Still, that's the kind of buzz they were hoping for. "We're trying to cater to all needs," says Ezelle. "But we know where our bread is buttered, it's with the students. That will always be our number one priority."

For longtime Starkville residents, The Landing is also a throwback. "It goes back to the early 80s, it became the place to go,"



From brunch to blue plates to dinner, a trip to Ty Thames' Restaurant Tyler is not to be missed when in town.

Ezelle says. "So, it's kind of nostalgic for older people and a brand-new experience for the younger ones."

But even as Starkville evolves, some things don't change, and honestly, shouldn't. On game days, The Little Dooley still draws a line out the door, as it has for over 35 years. Tucked into a modest wooden building on University Drive, it's not just a barbecue joint. It's an institution.

Since 1985, this family-owned barbecue joint has been a mainstay of game day weekends, with a line of hungry fans often stretching out the door and the unmistakable scent of hickory smoke curling into the air.

"Game day weekends mean everything to us and the city of Starkville," says owner Bart Wood, whose parents opened the original restaurant. "As MSU is displaying its finest, campus, facilities, staff, and athletes, we're also striving to display our finest in service and menu offerings."

The pride is palpable, not just in the food, though the signature pulled pork and award-winning catfish speak for themselves, but in the preparation that begins well before kickoff. "Our gameday prep can start weeks ahead," Bart explains. "From booking bands and sorority parents' events at our outdoor venue, the Tipsy Piggy, to planning pregame meals for visiting teams and media. The week of a home game is nonstop."

That mix of hustle and heart has helped The Little Dooley earn a fiercely loyal fan base over the past four decades. "Fall is a favorite time for us because we see so many friends we've made over the years come back and continue to support us," Bart says. "Our motto has always been, 'Come Taste The Pride.' We're truly humbled."

But staying true to the original doesn't mean staying stuck. "Dad always said, 'Be faithful to the girl that brought you to the dance,'" Bart adds. "Our signature BBQ meats and handcrafted sides will always be the stars of the menu, just like they were in



The Bulldog Burger Co., with its expansive menu and toppings galore, is a must-stop for burger aficionados.



The signature flags and the waft of smoky barbecue at The Little Dooley offer a warm welcome sight on game weekends.

1985. But we've added new items too, fresh blackened salmon, Texas-style brisket, and cheese fries. It's about keeping things fresh while still championing what people fell in love with."

Back in the Junction, it still fills up with tents as far as the eye can see, maroon and white draped across tables set with smoked

ribs, fried catfish, crockpots full of queso, wedges of Edam cheese from the Mississippi State Cheese Store, and homemade everything. The Dawg Walk still stirs something in your chest, no matter how many times you've seen it.

Every tent tells a story: fraternity brothers reunited for the 10th straight year, a family marking their 40th game day, freshmen hosting their very first spread. There's music, laughter, and a whole lot of cowbell.

In the quiet of Sunday morning, once the tents are folded down and the last cowbell has been packed away, Starkville exhales. Coffee shops hum with the low buzz of post-game debriefs. Boutique storefronts open for a lazy stroll. You might hear a street performer strumming a guitar outside a breakfast spot or smell bacon sizzling from the kitchen at Starkville Cafe.

This is where Starkville shines the brightest, not in the flash of victory or the glow of a night game, but in the warmth of its everyday rhythm.

That's the beauty of a place where tradition isn't just preserved, it's lived in. You see it in the carefully restored buildings on Main Street. In the chalkboard specials at Restaurant Tyler. In the quiet generosity of neighbors who still bring a covered dish to the tailgate, even if they barely know you.

Starkville is where the familiar and the fresh walk hand in hand. And maybe that's what makes a college town feel eternal. The layers. The passing down. The handoff between what was, what is, and what's next.

Here, fall weekends are stitched together with pride and ease. So just show up, bring a chair, and let this special town do the rest.

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