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Joseph Dringus, owner of Sweet Jenny's Restaurant in Barnegat, holds a Mediterranean chicken wrap served with sweet potato fries, and a Greek chicken salad. / Peter Ackerman/staff photographer

Craving a hearty breakfast, a fresh take on classic comfort food for lunch or dinner, or just something to satisfy your sweet tooth? Then head to Sweet Jenny's Restaurant in

Barnegat, where the vintage décor is reminiscent of the good old days, while the top-notch dishes and generous portions are sure to please a modern-day audience.

Operated by chef/owner Joseph Dringus since 2002 and then re-opened in July 2011 after a fire destroyed the original rustic-style eatery, "we moved Sweet Jenny's to a quaint, late 1800s-era building within a mile away in Barnegat and started over," Dringus said. Decorated with antiques and old pictures of Barnegat and other southern Ocean County locations, "we set out to capture the town's history and preserve its rich character and culture within a modern, family-friendly atmosphere." And Dringus has successfully accomplished that goal through the restaurant's charming indoor and outdoor patio and garden seating areas and extensive breakfast, lunch, and dinner menu items that highlight his self-described "American fusion cuisine."

While many classic breakfast combinations and sandwiches are priced at an affordable \$2.99, indulge in such luxuries as hash & eggs (\$6.99), the Chesapeake Omelet, containing spinach, tomatoes, mozzarella cheese, and crabmeat (\$9.99); or Joe's Fat Boy, a smorgasbord involving two buttermilk biscuits with sausage gravy and creamed chipped beef, two eggs any style, potato pancakes and crisp bacon (\$9.99). For \$5.99, "we also offer French toast caramelized with cinnamon sugar that will knock your socks off," Dringus promised.

Choose from more than 20 daily lunch specials, including the Kelly burger with its Reuben-style layers of Swiss cheese, homemade corned beef brisket, cole slaw and Russian dressing atop a half-pound of Angus beef (\$8.99) or the popular Mediterranean wrap made with grilled chicken, roasted red peppers, mozzarella cheese, lettuce and tomato, and a pesto aioli served with sweet potato fries and a honey dipping sauce

(\$9.99). “Salads are also huge here, both in popularity and size,” Dringus said. “There’s no such thing as a small portion at Sweet Jenny’s — everything is big.” That includes the Gavone Burger, a 2-pound burger loaded with the works that Dringus challenges diners to eat within 10 minutes to be included on the restaurant’s “wall of fame” (on which six people are currently recognized).

For dinner, enjoy theme nights each evening, from a variety of retro comfort foods on Tuesdays to seafood, Mexican and filet mignon nights and the Wednesday Pasta Extravaganza (\$16.99), “where any pasta, sauce and add-ins are made right in front of you” by Dringus himself. In addition, the restaurant’s current location was the former Hurricane House, believed to be the oldest ice cream parlor in Ocean County, enabling diners to indulge in dessert after lunch or dinner or to enjoy a quick fix anytime through its take-out window. “We maintained the famed parlor from the early 1900s with its original counter, soda fountain, and period furnishings,” he shared, but ‘modernized’ it with over 25 different flavors from Trenton-based Arctic Ice Cream — itself an over 80-year-old company — for visitors to enjoy.

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