

**BREAKING** FOUR MORE BODIES PULLED FROM RUBBLE IN MIAMI-AREA CONDO COLLAPSE, BRINGING DEATH TOLL TO 16

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# Congdon's Donuts built a food truck park, and people are eating it up

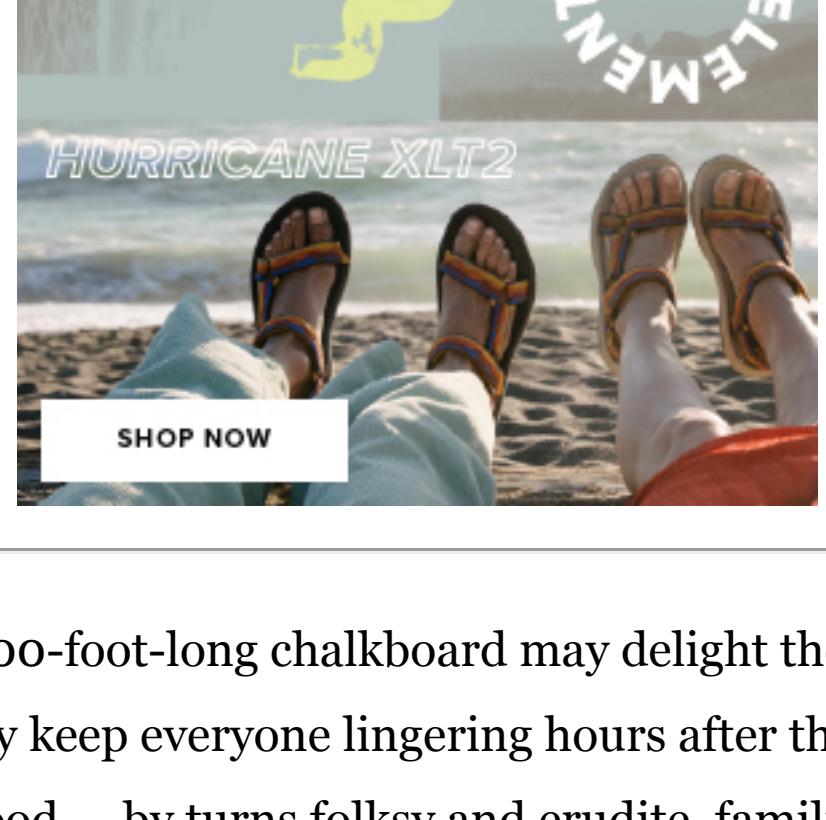
By Alexandra Hall Globe correspondent, July 16, 2018, 5:32 p.m.

WELLS, Maine — “I’ve got three dollars left,” says 13-year-old Zach, bills in one hand and a paper bowl full of chicken-lime burrito and an ear of coconut-glazed grilled corn in the other. He’s already downed half a beef nung pang sandwich with cucumber and chili mayo, while a gargantuan icing-crust doughnut awaits him on the abutting wooden picnic table. But still, he’s intent on spending those remaining dollars on something else delicious, and is going to do it pretty much the same way a kid chooses which rides to spend his remaining tickets on at the fairway.



YOON S. BYUN

That’s an apt enough analogy since, if you’re a food lover, the Congdon’s After Dark Food Truck Park feels an awful lot like a carnival. And in that respect, most grown-ups feel like kids here, too.



Sure, the nightly face painters and 200-foot-long chalkboard may delight the tykes. And the classic car shows, live music, and craft beer garden may keep everyone lingering hours after they’ve finished their meal. But it’s the rotating panoply of wallet-friendly food — by turns folksy and erudite, familiar and adventurous, and often all of the above at once — that brings them all here in the first place, all summer long.

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Many nights, they’re pushing 1,000 people, said Gary Leech, longtime owner of Congdon’s Donuts. Establishing this, New England’s only food truck park, in the vacant dirt-and-grass parking lot sitting next to his family’s iconic business (Congdon’s doughnuts are arguably one of Maine’s most prized foodstuffs) was his brainchild last year. “We were trying to decide whether to open another restaurant in the space, and I knew about every-night parks in other parts of the country,” he says. “So why not try one here?”



A sign for Congdon’s Doughnuts and the food truck park. YOON S. BYUN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

While New England cities like Boston, Providence, Portsmouth, and Portland have certainly gotten cozy with food trucks and occasional festivals, none yet boast a nightly park. It took a 60-something doughnut legend in Wells with no food truck experience to make that happen. “It’s been like learning to walk while you’re in the middle of a marathon,” says Adam Leech, Gary’s son, who last summer helped his father invite a couple friends who ran food trucks over to be the first to participate. “Then starting last fall, my dad and my sister Jill [Congdon’s business manager, Jill Shomphe] and I all sat down and talked about what we could do to expand it, and make it an extension of the family-focused doughnut restaurant we already had.”



Patrons place orders at the El Rodeo Go food truck at Congdon’s After Dark in Wells, Maine. YOON S. BYUN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

And true to that, as with most things in Maine, building it had everything to do with long-held relationships. This summer, on any given night at the park, Adam’s wife, Barbara Leech, is likely working in the Congdon’s truck, while his sons are usually on trash duty. Gary usually does the rounds, checking in with everyone after his late-afternoon nap (he still wakes up at 6 a.m. every morning to be on doughnut duty in the restaurant). And the guys with one of the longest lines in the park, Chris Schofield and Matt Mills, are Adam’s old friends from high school.

They’re now co-owners of Barreled Souls, known for its funky and unusual brews, and in the park’s makeshift beer garden (dedicated almost entirely to Maine craft brews), bartenders dole out a honey-dipped blonde made from Congdon’s doughnuts that Barreled Souls created especially for the park. “We developed it with Adam and Gary, figuring that since it’s made from a light doughnut, it would fit well with almost any kind of food in the park,” says Schofield, who grew up working at Congdon’s as a kid, and whose mom worked as a waitress there for many years. “The beer sells out faster than we can keep up with making it. We just weren’t prepared for how many people would come and want it.”



A patron puts powdered sugar on fried dough from Big Grampa’s Grill food truck at Congdon’s After Dark. YOON S. BYUN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Gary describes the snowball crowds as something akin to a scene out of the movie “Chef” — with every new truck and picnic table they’ve added, the more people have come. When trucks see that, more of them come, too. And it’s the consistency of having the trucks in one place that’s fueled it. “Nobody around had done anything around here that’s daily for trucks,” he says. “This way the trucks know they can make thousands [of dollars] every night, so more just keep coming.”

As do even more crowds. “In the summer Wells goes from a town of 10,000 people to 100,000 very quickly,” says Adam. “The locals keep us going initially this summer, and they’re still here in July. But now we see out-of-towners coming off the beach straight to us. They just hang out while their kids play and bring their dogs. We don’t shoo anyone out, so it goes in late into the night.”



Visitors to Congdon’s After Dark check out the Tasting Maine’s food truck. YOON S. BYUN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

But while the number of trucks may catch plenty of eyes, it’s the diversity of their food that’s the real draw. Nearby Portland, with its slew of restaurants slinging world cuisines (and with world-class levels of quality and innovation), has no dearth of foods to dive into. But outside the city lines? Not so much. “Before it was only seafood and ice cream in Wells,” says Adam. “Those are great, but that was it. This has changed that equation. Now you could literally come every night for a month and never eat the same meal twice.”

That means a lot of everything, all of it landing in different spots on the high/low spectrum. One night it could be cheeseburgers topped with crab rangoon from Hoss and Mary’s Tasty Grub (a cult favorite since it was on the Food Network Show “Man vs. Food” five years ago) and the next it might be fried chicken with soy garlic sauce and house-made pickled carrots and papaya from Portland’s Nom Bai Street Kitchen. From Knew Potato Caboose who might grab a plate of French fries with hot sauce to eat while you wait for a slice from Pizze (which has a wood fire oven built into the side of its truck) or bowl of sour cherry gelato at Gorgeous Gelato — an outpost of the flagship in Portland’s Old Port. At Fishin’ Ships you’ll find plenty of classic fried seafood, but regulars know not to bypass the menu’s céviche tostadas or delicate haddock and bacon croquettes. The choices are dizzying enough that it’s easy to find yourself down to your last few dollars (the park is cash only, though there’s an ATM on site) struggling to decide on just one more thing to eat. Says Gary, about both running the place and eating there: “You just don’t know what’s going to happen every night.”

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Congdon’s After Dark Food Truck Park, 1100 Post Road, Wells, Maine, 207-646-4219, [cudfoodtrucks.com](http://cudfoodtrucks.com). Open daily, 4 p.m. until closing, most nights at midnight.

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