

Great Diner Nostalgia at Felts Field's Skyway Café

by Kevin Finch | photos by Keith Currie Photography

TRAIN CAR DINERS LIKE Frank's and Knight's dominate the transportation-themed restaurant scene in Spokane. They top nearly every reader poll for "best area diners." Yet if you are in the mood for a friendly greasy-spoon experience, consider upgrading from trains to planes and head out to the Skyway Café at Felts Field. In terms of leg-room, this switch of venue feels like a move from coach to first class. Nearly all the seats at the Skyway Café are tucked under regular tables that are much more accommodating to long legs than the cramped train car counters.

If you fear you'll be leaving nostalgia behind, don't worry. The Skyway Café is packed with airplane memorabilia along with a nice dose of kitsch: little signs that announce things like "DRINK COFFEE – Do Stupid Things Faster with More Energy." Then there are the real planes. During a recent visit, a historic bi-plane taxied by the café windows and took off while we were polishing off a burger and a hot turkey sandwich.

The café first opened in 1921 and eventually became a part of the larger art deco airport terminal built in 1932 to serve as the region's municipal airport in the 1930s and 1940s. Both Northwest and United flew out of the terminal until commercial flights shifted to Geiger Field after World War II. This changed the clientele for Felts Field, but it has never closed

down. The runways handle charter services and flight instruction, as well as private planes. The field also has docks on the north edge for seaplanes that are able to land on the Spokane River.

All this activity provides a unique back-drop for breakfast and lunch at the café which has been known as the Skyway Café since the 1940s. Sandy and John Melter bought the café in 2006 from Sandy's sister, but this family connection is only the beginning. Sandy's mother served as the main cook in the kitchen for seventeen years, and Sandy herself ran the kitchen in the early 1990s. Add in the fact that the Melters are also both pilots with their own runway up in Greenacres, and their purchase of the Skyway seems like destiny.

As for food, expect to find all the diner standards on the six-page menu. Sandy significantly expanded the menu last year to cover all the familiar ground at breakfast: buttermilk pancakes, French toast, waffles, three-egg omelets, Eggs Benedict, biscuits and gravy. You can get a steak or a pork chop with your eggs as easily as bacon, sausage, ham or corned beef hash. Beware the full order of the Chicken Fried Steak (\$11.35) unless you plan to share or haven't eaten for several days. Ours arrived a full foot long and nearly six inches wide with two eggs, hash browns and toast. Also noteworthy

