

Exploring the Natural State

Hendrix College

Introduction:

Arkansas cuisine is southern-style comfort food that combines a rich history of traditions and diverse cultural influences. Southern comfort food is more than a meal, its nostalgia wrapped up in family history, community, and a sense of wellbeing. With 87% of our students from southern states (55% Arkansans), we knew our students would appreciate a taste of home event.

Smoked pork, cornbread, catfish, okra, hushpuppies, chocolate gravy, and cheese dip were just a few items served. Many of these recipes continue to be loved and honored in many Arkansas homes today and are part of our southern food culture.

Essay:

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Hendrix Dining, located in the Student Life & Technology Center, is the community hub of the college. As the sole dining facility on campus, we are the place where students, staff, and faculty gather to dine and connect. Our priority is a commitment to student satisfaction by staying on-trend, serving a variety of appealing selections, and providing nutritious options for those with dietary restrictions.

To make things interesting, we create memorable experiences through themed lunches that are shared with the entire Hendrix Community. On November 6, we brought the traditional flavors and historical sites of Arkansas to our dining hall.

Arkansas is nicknamed "The Natural State" because of its vast wilderness, plentiful wildlife, and beautiful mountains, bayous, and wetlands. The scenic Ozark and Ouachita Mountains, popular for outdoor recreation, are comprised of caves, trails, rivers, lakes, hot springs, and waterfalls. For those who enjoy rockhounding, the state offers a unique experience to mine for diamonds or quartz crystals.

Agriculture is Arkansas's largest industry with over 40% of the state comprised of farmland. Some of the most significant products are rice, corn, wheat, sorghum, soybeans, and catfish.

Welcome to Arkansas! Come explore The Natural State with us!

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When visiting The Natural State, Arkansans will always boast about their traditional foods, historical sites, and beautiful landscapes. For our dining hall transition, we chose to recreate many of these cultural and scenic areas to generate an inviting experience. Regional music performed by students enhanced the theme. Rock mining and cave exploring activities were added for engagement and delicious tastes of Arkansas' southern-style comfort foods were presented creatively to entice our guests. The various full-service or self-service stations decorated as popular Arkansas attractions served grilled items, sautés, pizza, desserts, smoothies, stir-fry, garden varieties, and homestyle cuisine.

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The event was publicized to the Hendrix Community through posters, social media, and emails.

For guest satisfaction, we created interactive activities that included mining for crystals and cave exploring in our manmade cavern. Our staff designed a country porch and invited music students to portray porch fiddlers to help create the atmosphere. The historic Old Mill of North Little Rock was replicated and used as a backdrop for photographs.

Collective feedback is an important aspect of theme design and helps to shape further events. We gathered remarks from students, staff, and faculty in surveys collected from our social media accounts.

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Event success is measured through positive guest experience not necessarily record attendance or sales. Campus participation and positive feedback are the result of extensive preparation from our dedicated staff.

When organizing events, sustainable efforts are always in the forefront of our design and menu ideas by incorporating local foods, upcycling materials, repurposing designed projects, or borrowing costumes and decor. Using these resources to create this event, staff added unconventional ideas using coffee grounds for mine dirt, and recycled cardboard and packing materials to craft the Old Mill, cavern, diamond mine, picking porch, and food stations that ultimately wowed our guests.

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