

Editor's note: **Loving Hut** is located inside of Golden Green Hotel, a cost-effective green vegan hotel. In addition to **Loving Hut**, the hotel is opening a Vegan Sober Bar.

It's no secret that vegan food is on the rise in Charlotte — vegan restaurants dot the city and vegan food trucks are growing in popularity. As the plant-based food movement grows nationwide, we can expect to see nationwide chains expand to Charlotte. **Loving Hut**, located in the Golden Green Hotel, is one such restaurant offering a wide vegan menu to Charlotte diners.

Si Blake, Fred Lawing and Lourdes Tam opened the Charlotte location of **Loving Hut** in November 2019.

IMG_0721.jpg **Loving Hut** owner Si Blake holds the Meatless Lovers pizza, topped with marinara sauce, vegan mozzarella cheese, vegan ground beef, sausage, bacon, and black olives.

"I have been vegan for 30 years. The only reason I use insurance is for my annual checkup, and I wanted to share this food with the world," Blake told CharlotteFive recently. "My main reasons for opening the restaurant, however, were compassion and climate change." Employees wear hats with the motto "Vegans R Heroes" stitched across the front.

Business grew steadily the first few months, yet the COVID-19 pandemic forced **Loving Hut** to switch to takeout only in March 2020. The labor shortage that followed hasn't helped, either. "We've been short staffed since September," Lawing said. "We considered closing, but customers kept calling, so we decided to stay open on weekends."

IMG_3264.jpeg **Loving Hut's** Buffalo Ranch Chickun Burger.

Growing in popularity

While vegans have welcomed the restaurant, many have needed help warming up to the idea of entirely plant-based food. "We donated several lunches to essential workers at the intensive care unit. At first they were skeptical, but later many came back asking to buy more food," Blake said. "Oh yeah — they told us, 'We started trying it bite by bite, and now we'd like you to please send more,'" Lawing added, smiling proudly.

Group ordering by large corporations has also helped the chain reach new customers. Sharebite, a group food delivery service, reached out to **Loving Hut** during the pandemic. Many employees ordered lunch via this service, encouraging non-vegans to try out plant-based options.

"Vegan food is a big trend — more people are wanting to try it," Lawing said.

IMG_0717.jpg **Loving Hut** offers a variety of pasta dishes.

Blake credits the wide variety of menu options — appetizers, salads, soups, sandwiches, pizza, pasta, rice dishes and more. She had just finished making a strawberry cake when I arrived, and the broths and sauces are both made on site. "We have American comfort food, so if you're already eating burgers or fries, you can transition to vegan versions," Blake said.

Popular dishes

With such a large menu, the options might be overwhelming to those new to vegan cuisine. Lawing's favorites are the Gluten Free Salisbury Steak (grilled Beyond burger patty with steak sauce, served with steak fries and fresh salad with dijon balsamic dressing) and the Grilled Veggies Sub (grilled zucchini, bell pepper, artichoke and red onion topped with house pesto sauce).

Loving_Hut-09775.jpg **Loving Hut's** vegan Philly cheesesteak with a side Caesar salad.

Blake is a big fan of the Alfredo Penne (penne pasta in cashew alfredo sauce with capers, garlic, crushed red peppers, spinach and a choice of vegan chicken or vegan shrimp, topped with vegan Parmesan cheese) and the Philly Cheesesteak (vegan steak, caramelized onion, red and green bell peppers and melted vegan cheese).

As a non-vegan, I was a bit intimidated by the menu. However the stuffed shells tasted no different than the pasta I'm used to. The buffalo drumstick, one of **Loving Hut's** most popular appetizers, had the consistency closest to chicken of any alternative I've tried, and though I didn't try it — the coconut cake looked delicious.

IMG_0707.jpg Loving Hut's coconut cake.

Loving Hut

Location: 3024 E Independence Blvd, Charlotte, NC 28205

Neighborhood: Coliseum Drive

Menu

Cuisine: Vegan (American, Asian)

Hours: Friday, 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m. and 5p.m.-8p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 11:30a.m.-8p.m.

To order: Call 980-219-4339 or order online for takeout.

Instagram: @lovinghutcharlotte

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