

The Dallas Morning News

How Plano Got Cool

3.24.15 Sarah Blaskovich

Plano has grown up since I grew up there.

My parents moved to the suburb north of Dallas in 1980 because of its nationally known great schools and safe streets. They raised two kids and had a dog in a wholesome central Plano neighborhood that was, back then, full of grassy lots that would soon hold two-story brick homes. For our growing family, Plano was perfect.

It was also popular: A population of about 70,000 in 1980 jumped to more than 250,000 in 2010. Despite massive growth, schools were still strong. Streets were still safe. But when I came back from college in search of something exciting to do with friends, I never stayed close to home. Plano wasn't "cool." In fact, some parents might say that was one of the best things about raising teens in Plano: its lack of edge.

Today, Plano is markedly different from the Plano of my childhood. Back then, a big Friday night meant delivery pizza and a Blockbuster rental. These days, you can strap on a pair of high heels and stay out late, even on a school night.

Plano is the bookish teenager who grew up to be gorgeous.

City officials spent years gussying up the town. The key was to bring independently owned restaurants to redeveloped areas such as the Shops at Legacy and downtown Plano. Persuading those restaurateurs to head north wasn't difficult, either: Some of them operated restaurants in Dallas but lived in Plano so their kids could go to school there. Funny how that works.

A class of new, notable restaurants and hot spots has made Plano a destination. Here is proof Plano is officially cool:

Downtown Plano

I think the single most important investment in Plano is its revitalized downtown. Twenty-five years ago, downtown Plano played host to my kiddie tap-dance recitals at Christmastime. Cool it was not. But in came the DART lines, which were key to making downtown Plano feel urban, says Mark Thompson, director of the Plano Convention & Visitors Bureau. Slowly, surely, downtown Plano amassed bars and restaurants such as Lockhart Smokehouse, DaLat and Urban Crust. Suburbanites (and their hip Dallas friends) started congregating at the bars, too, such as the 32 Degrees rooftop bar atop Urban Crust. From there, you can catch a great view of how far downtown Plano has come.



Whiskey Cake

This farm-to-table restaurant on the Dallas North Tollway was one of the first signs that parents could eat well - and drink responsibly - with their kids in tow. How novel that a place with "whiskey" in its name has become so popular with families. Whiskey Cake just oozes cool: The interior looks like your artsy friend's Pinterest board. The menu hits trends head-on - think pork belly ramen and chicken and waffles - without hiking prices over about \$15 a plate.

3601 Dallas Parkway, Plano. 972-993-2253. whiskey-cake.com.



Love and War in Texas

Rocking and rolling since 1999, Love and War in Texas is one of the older signs that Plano was headed in the right direction. On any given Thursday, Friday or Saturday, Love and War celebrates Lone Star sounds with live concerts. Folks come from all over to two-step, and they've helped foster a country-music community that's no longer rare in Plano.

601 E. Plano Parkway, Plano. 972-422-6201. loveandwarintexas.com.

Smoke

The original Smoke, in West Dallas, championed a simple but sophisticated concept: good food cooked over fire. When Smoke No. 2 opened in Plano, the owners wanted to make sure it didn't feel like a Dallas place plunked in the 'burbs. And it doesn't: Smoke near Park Boulevard and Preston Road in Plano is its own flame, with a special "hearth" where chef Tim Byres smokes, rotisseries and grills meat and veggie dishes. The decor is funky fun; it's just asking to be Instagrammed.

2408 Preston Road at Park Boulevard, Plano. 972-599-2222. smokerestaurant.com.

Angelika Film Center

The opening of Plano's first art-house theater more than 10 years ago signaled a shift in cinema for suburbanites. A 2003 Dallas Morning News story forecast that the theater would offer diversity, art and culture - "the kinds of things that some people - and relocating companies - expect to find only in big cities." No longer. The Angelika helps anchor the Shops at Legacy and brings indie legitimacy to a city formerly criticized for its chain restaurants and cookie-cutter neighborhoods.

7205 Bishop Road, Plano. 972-943-1300. angelikafilmcenter.com/plano.

The Fillmore Pub

It describes itself as a "neighborhood bar" - the kind of place where you'll feel plenty comfortable grabbing a seat alone, though you're bound to end up chatting with one of the regulars nearby. All kinds are welcome, from 20-something hipsters to families with young kids to baby boomers. Feel free to nerd out on beer here: It's one of the few places in Collin County where you can hem and haw over an extensive list of Belgians, porters, stouts or IPAs. The Fillmore is a welcome East Plano addition that will even serve food well past curfew. It's yet another sign that Plano doesn't close after the sun goes down.

1004 E. 15th St., Plano. 972-423-2400. thefillmorepub.com.



Food truck park

Never mind that food trucks have been hot in other regions for years; their moment in Plano is now. A food truck park called Hub Street is expected to open by fall just east of downtown Plano. Plans call for an anchor restaurant made of former shipping containers and a gaggle of food trucks parked nearby. It's another way to aim for that "new urban vibe," Thompson says.

To be located at 14th Street and Avenue M in Plano.

Pinstack

A family-friendly city like Plano could always use more places to tire out the little ones, and new restaurant and bowling alley Pinstack will certainly do that. It'll also entertain the adults in the group, though, and that's key here. The 50,000-square-foot spot has an arcade, laser tag, bumper cars and rock-climbing walls. The West Plano location is a smart choice: Most of the existing bowling alleys are along U.S. Highway 75 in Richardson, Plano and Allen.

6205 Dallas Parkway, Plano. 972-781-2695. pinstackbowl.com.



Katy Trail Ice House Outpost

Here's another example of a Dallas transplant that carved its own identity in the 'burbs. The original Katy Trail Ice House in Uptown is a backyard full of 20-somethings getting some sun. The Plano outpost is more of a family spot, where your kiddo can entertain himself throwing beanbags while you sip a margarita in an Austin-like oasis. Katy Trail Ice House could have opened a successful second location anywhere in D-FW, but Plano was the right place.

4700 W. Park Blvd., Plano. 972-599-9000. katyicehouse.com/Katy_Ice_House_Outpost.html.

The Shops at Legacy

Stop in for lunch or grab a bite in the evening; the shopping center at Legacy and the

Dallas North Tollway always seems to be bustling. While some of it can feel very splashy-suburban - the big parking garages don't help - locally owned restaurants such as East Hampton Sandwich Co. and Jasper's give it some down-home authenticity. Stop into the Ginger Man for a pint and you'll get a vibe similar to the one at its darling sibling down in Dallas.

In the area around 5741 Legacy Drive, Plano. shopsatlegacy.com.