

"It kind of sucks you in," says Kim Chaddick, an A&M senior from Houston. "You go over there for lunch and get a pitcher. Then another. And 'just one more.'"

"Then, gradually, you get to talking to people and you forget that you had afternoon classes, that you had studying to do and that you don't have any more money until next Friday."

We resist temptation to join those escaping the world for a few hours, and walk out of Dudley's by the front door. Outside, we see a crowd of people hanging out on the long wooden benches that line the front porches on either side of the door.

"A lot of folks just naturally migrate to the front porch," Benning says. "We have one on either side of the door, so you can have two unique social groups out there; they can intermingle if they want to."

"We're living in a small town in the country, and there's no pollution problem. It's really nice just to be outside. It's pretty agreeable weather six or seven months out of the year."

After stopping to chat with a couple of leather-jacketed guys whose motorcycles are pulled up next to the porches, we reverse our steps back past the Dixie Chicken and head over to Sticky Chins to get some ice cream.

The old-fashioned soda shop

We pass the Chicken's front porch, which also tends to collect people, and enter Sticky Chins—which, incidentally, Ganter also owns.

It's a long, narrow building just large enough to hold several dozen flavors of ice cream and a couple of tables. Most folks just get a dip and eat it while they continue their walk down Northgate. But it's nice to sit here for a few minutes and watch people go by. The shop opened in 1985.

"Sticky Chins used to be a bicycle shop for years," Ganter says, "then I rented it for years and it was nothing but a storage room. Roof caving in and everything else. I remodeled the whole building. . . . We're looking for the 1800s soda-shop deal over there."

Pizza pizzazz

Next to Sticky Chins is the Flying Tomato, a pizza-pub that has rock 'n' roll bands once or twice a week. The Flying Tomato also has tables out front where people can sit and watch the world go by.

Hopping to please

Hungry? But you've got only five minutes and a couple of dollars to your name? No problem. We'll go to the Cow Hop. For about \$2 each, we order a "cow pie with fries" and unlimited iced tea.

The long-haired androgynous-looking employee adds our ticket to the long row of others awaiting

attention in the smoke-filled kitchen. Despite its unappetizing name, the cow pie is a fairly good hamburger, and the Cow Hop, open since 1978, is another Northgate institution.

"You've got seniors taking freshmen here," says John Ward, manager. "We like to think it's almost a tradition at A&M." The place doesn't have a lot of class, but its quick, assembly-line service and rock-bottom prices keep the customers coming back.

"NUMBER 485!!" yells an irate voice from the kitchen window. "Yeah, you! Come get your food before it gets cold!" We grab our burgers and find a seat out back, in the sunshine. It takes about five to seven minutes from the end of the line to when you get your burger. When you have half an hour for lunch, that's

hard to put these in a category.

"We used to kid around—when people would say what kind of food do you have, we'd say, 'Uh, we have Gizmonian food,'" says Laurie Tanguy, owner of Gizmo's. "It's really the only way to describe it. A lot of people want to call us a soup-sandwich-salad type of place, but we're not. Our most popular items are like—things that we made up. They aren't sandwiches, they're not salads, they're not entrees. Like the shrimp dip in a round sourdough bowl-thing. It doesn't really fit. It's like munchie food."

Gizmo's, which opened in 1985, has mixed drinks, tablecloths, aquarium-lined walls and waiters. Soft jazz music is piped in. The atmosphere is a notch up from the usual Northgate fare, which shows in the prices on the

pleasant environment more conducive to a conversation."

Brazos Landing offers—depending on the season—oysters on the half-shell, crayfish, shrimp and other seafood items. The menu items are surprisingly inexpensive, and on Sunday the special is an all-you-can-eat fish dinner. The restaurant has both rock 'n' roll and jazz bands playing some weekends.

Northgate extras

Also on the strip are several bookstores, a camera shop, a chicken-wing restaurant, a sandwich shop and two other pizza places.

Most of the food places, with an eye on the student market, accept personal checks and offer free delivery to the A&M residence halls. Northgate draws quite a lunch crowd during the day, with people walking to and from the University. Several new restaurants have opened in the last year or so, hoping to capitalize on this prime location.

Dance after dark

If we feel like dancing, we can walk farther down the block to Rocco's, a restaurant that turns into a new wave nightclub after dark. The crowd here consists mainly of sorority and fraternity types, well-dressed, talkative and sociable. The feeling is upbeat and big-city.

Rocco's, open since 1986, has live rock 'n' roll bands, a variety of food items to choose from the lunch menu, and dance-new wave music nightly.

A potential problem is that most of the churches in College Station are on the street—aptly named Church Street—directly behind Northgate. But Benning says all efforts are made to make sure the church grounds aren't disturbed by "happy" customers leaving the strip. With a few exceptions, there's been a peaceful coexistence.

"We pay for a guy to come out every Saturday morning and sweep the church parking lots," Benning says, "and we try to pick up any debris that might be on the lawns. We try to give the image that we're not even over here. This is a residential neighborhood, with a lot of churches, but if everyone does their part, usually we have no complaints."

So far, the most successful and permanent Northgate establishments have been hole-in-the-wall, college hangouts. The exceptions—like Gizmo's, Brazos Landing and Rocco's—are all fairly new, so it may take the test of time to determine whether Northgate can be civilized. After all, the jury is still out on whether A&M itself can be civilized. But in the meantime, the drinks at Northgate will keep flowing, the bands will play and people will want to hang out and escape the world for a few hours. And whenever you feel like a beer—or five, or six—Northgate will be there.



Photo by Shelly Schluter

pretty good. Sunday nights, when A&M's dining halls are closed, the Cow Hop does a big business.

This summer the Cow Hop expanded into the empty building next door. The Cow Hop Expansion has pool tables and occasional live bands.

New kids on the block

Also competing for the lunch crowd are two more new restaurants, the Brazos Landing, which offers pretty inexpensive seafood, and Gizmo's, which has, well, unusual food. It's

menu, although they're still reasonable. Tanguy says she's more interested in quality than quantity.

"You can't get a meal for \$1.50 here," she says. "There's a market for that, because people are on limited budgets, but that's not what I'm doing here."

Stearns, owner of Brazos Landing, shares Tanguy's philosophy.

"Our ambition was to try to bring something a little more sophisticated than the usual Northgate scene," Stearns says. "Live jazz and blues, a menu that has more to eat than burgers, a nice selection of beer and a place where it's a little nicer to sit—a