

You Can Fly Me To The Moon If We Can Stop For A \$100 Burger First

By Culinary Expert and Charlotte, NC Food Writer, Heidi Billotto, heidibillottofood.com/

Just an hour and half drive away from Charlotte, it would never, ever occur to me to fly into Rutherford County, but people do – all the time.



Their destination: straight for the 5000-foot asphalt runway at Latitude: 35-25-41.6 N ; Longitude: 81-56-6.28 W or in layman's terms, [The Rutherford County Airport](#), aka [Marchman Field](#), just 3 miles north of **Rutherfordton, NC.**

In addition to being the gateway to the county for private and corporate jets, this public airport is also home to [57 Alpha Cafe](#) and the infamous \$100 burger.

Proof that there is always a story behind the story is found in the fact that the man behind the burger has almost as many layers of flavor as the fare he serves to guests.

In a word (or two), 57 Alpha Cafe chef, owner and chief bottle washer, Ron McKinney is a Rutherfordton Renaissance man and a local treasure. He offers burgers and south-of-the-border specialties with sides of lively conversation along with services for aerial photography, info and video on raptors in the area, and local anthropological and archeological dig tours! But all of that's a story for another time. The focus this day is on the food.

McKinney's burgers include the Plane (pun intended) and Cheese—also with bacon. All are made from 100% ground chuck. They are the bomb and will make for a delicious mouthful of a midday repast.

"This isn't McDonald's quarter pounder," McKinney told me. He explained it makes for a better product to do everything fresh and to order. "I don't know how much they weigh," he says. "I just shape them until they feel right!"



Indeed. Hand-patted into shape and pan fried to order, this is the kind of burger where the juices



seep into the bun, and flavor oozes into every bite. Why do they call it the \$100 burger? When you consider the cost of jet fuel, that's about the cost of what it takes to fly in...and the burger is an extra \$10.

I went for the burger, but I fell in love with the place itself: a tiny three table dining room with an adjacent porch and picnic tables; and the superb enchiladas made with well-seasoned pork, braised for several hours, then seasoned, shredded and stuffed into a tortilla with an oh-so amazing sauce. It's served with a slice-of-heaven banana pudding!

57 Alpha is an off the beaten track place with limited hours (11 am to 2 pm, Tuesday - Sunday), so a bit of planning is required to hit it just right; and it's cash only, so come prepared.

If I had a jet, I'd fly in for lunch every day. As it is, I plan to drive up again soon, and so should you!

[57 Alpha Airport Cafe](#)
Rutherford County Airport
828-286-1677



As a Charlotte food and restaurant writer I'm always looking for the next new thing. With a burgeoning culinary community and an assemblage of creative chefs, that "next new thing" is never very far away. Sometimes, however, it's more fun to take a road trip and travel out of my 15- or 20-mile radius of a comfort zone to explore the world, or at least the rest of the state.

On the suggestion of a good friend, I recently took the opportunity to eat my way around **Rutherford County, NC**. Fun, historic with lots of great dining and getaway options, Rutherford County surprised and pleased me with all it has to offer. It won't be long till I head back up to enjoy it all over again.

Want More?

Watch a clip of Heidi Bilotto on NBC's "Charlotte Today" on [WCNC.com](#).
At the end of the short segment, you'll hear her talk about 57 Alpha Airport Cafe.

AND

Check out her "Dining Secrets In Our Small Foothill Towns" [here](#)