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ATHENS BANNER-HERALD

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Former patron transforms longtime Athens bar



Roadhouse general manager Jazmen Williams poses for a photo outside of the bar's office in downtown Athens on May 7. ANDREW SHEARER/ATHENS BANNER-HERALD

Andrew Shearer
Athens Banner-Herald
USA TODAY NETWORK

For Roadhouse general manager Jazmen Williams, sobriety didn't mean leaving bar culture behind. It meant rebuilding it from the inside out.

Opened in 1991, the longtime Athens dive bar remains one of the city's most eclectic gathering spots. College students, musicians, bikers, burlesque performers, and decades-long regulars crowd together beneath Christmas lights and live music.

When Williams returned to Athens in 2017 after getting clean in California, she

found a business she loved struggling under what she describes as years of chaos rooted in unsafe behavior and a hard-drinking environment.

"Roadhouse was my home before I got sober," Williams told the Banner-Herald. "All my friends worked there. That's where we partied."

Back as a bartender, the bar's sense of community quickly drew her in. Regulars introduced themselves, brought her food, and welcomed her like family. At the same time, she recognized elements of the culture that needed to change for the space to feel safer and more intentional.

For years, Alcoholics Anonymous

chips had been glued to the wall, part of an informal tradition in which customers could trade sobriety chips for free drinks if they relapsed. When Williams came back, those were the first to go.

"I removed all of the AA chips that were glued onto the wall," Williams said. "I told everybody, 'Times have changed, and we will change some things.'"

The decision sparked backlash from longtime regulars, but she held firm. Over time, she reshaped the atmosphere through deliberate

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5 days to vote early before runoff races

Wayne Ford
Athens Banner-Herald
USA TODAY NETWORK

Five days of early voting for the June 16 runoff election start Monday, June 8, and run through Friday, June 12.

The runoff has some significant races at stake, including the non-partisan mayor's race in Athens and statewide the Republican party's nomination for the governor and the U.S. Senate race.

In Athens, advance voting will be held at the Elections Office, 155 East Washington St., Athens Clarke-County Library, 2025 Baxter St., and the Athens-Clarke County Tennis Center, 4460 Lexington Road.

The locations will be open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day, with the exception of Wednesday, June 10, when the locations remain open until 7 p.m.

In Oconee County, countywide voting is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Oconee County Administration Building, 7635 Macon Highway, Watkinsville.

In Athens, the mayor's election pits Tim Denson, who led a field of five in the May primary election, against Dexter Fisher, who is serving as a commissioner.

Two commission seats will be decided. Incumbent District 9 Commissioner Ovita Thornton almost avoided a runoff as she received about 49% of the vote on May 19. She will face Tracy Smith, who received about 42% of the vote in the three-person race.

District 5, without an incumbent, is a race between Kimberly Bennett, who led a field of four candidates, and Craig Topple.

Also, on the ballots in Athens and other counties are runoffs in other

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EAT ATHENS

Mediterranean Grill delivers a veggie feast

Andrew Shearer
Athens Banner-Herald
USA TODAY NETWORK

After writing about burgers, sandwiches, barbecue, chicken fingers, and pizza for a solid month, my body was in dire need of some vegetables.

Since dedicated vegetarian or vegan restaurants are in short supply in the Athens area, I'm always on the lookout for any places that can come close to offering a meat-free feast. Though I'm always up for Maepole or Dondero's, I found myself in Five Points last week in search of a tasty green lunch.

Located at 1591 S. Lumpkin St., Mediterranean Grill is open from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day except Thursday, when it closes a little earlier at 8:30 p.m. The

area is always busy, especially during lunch and dinner hours, and locals are spoiled for choice when it comes to great dining spots all within reasonable walking distance from wherever they can luck out with parking.

I was in the mood for more than just a big salad, and I ended up striking gold.

Mediterranean Grill opened in October 2015, taking over the space previously occupied by the short-lived YoBo Cantina. Mediterranean Grill is part of a small Atlanta-based chain founded in 2000, around the same time Smoothie King opened its long-running Athens spot right next door. Both businesses share the 1960s-era building with the original Baddies Burgers location,

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A vegetarian plate featuring hummus, baba ghanouj, tabouleh, crispy falafel, and side salad at Mediterranean Grill in Athens on May 22.

ANDREW SHEARER/ATHENS BANNER-HERALD

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