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## Gulu-Gulu a Relaxing Place to Enjoy music or Talking

By [Tim Shannon](#)

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The first step into The Gulu-Gulu Café one will immediately notice that there is something different about this place. Located in Salem, the restaurant features local artists' work hanging on the walls, a sign at the door that announces "Please Seat Yourself," comfy couches, and a cabinet full of board games anyone can use. This is the type of place that makes you feel at home, and all the features personify the laid-back atmosphere of the location.

Sitting in Gulu-Gulu means you never have to shout over distractions to have a conversation or be stuck with a limited selection of food and drinks. The Gulu takes the best characteristics from a restaurant, bar and coffee house, and finds the perfect middle ground.

So what does Gulu-Gulu (pronounced Goo-Lou) mean? The literal answer is the French translation for the English term glug-glug in reference to drinking, but it is also the name of the Prague restaurant where Gulu-Gulu owners Steve Feldman and Marie Feldmannova—now husband and wife—met. The Salem restaurant is a tribute and modeled after that Praguian restaurant.

The first Gulu-Gulu Café opened in Lynn in May 2005. The Salem location (right behind the Bewitched statue) followed two years later and flourished, outlasting the initial restaurant. The Salem café offers reasonably priced food including crepes, paninis, sandwiches, salads, desserts, and a chalkboard list full of imports and drafts. Gulu-Gulu has won "Best Beer Selection" the past two years in The Best of the North Shore Magazine; in 2008, it was also listed in "The Salem Insider" for bringing more live music to Salem.

Every Wednesday at 7 p.m., the environment transforms with infectious energy as open mike begins. Launched in January 2009, hosts Brian Donnelly and Jeff Savlon, play off each other like a veteran stage act, keeping things lively and humorous.

"It's a very eclectic open mike," Donnelly said. "Whether you want to tap dance, sing, do poetry etc., it's accepting of that. There's always a group of people that come to hear the art and will come up and tell you they like your stuff."

Competing with other open mikes in the Salem area, the drive for distinction among the crowd is vital and one that Gulu uniquely delivers.

"I really believe in setting an atmosphere where people feel like someone is listening," Savlon said. "What's also important though, is making sure there isn't too much dead air between one performer and the next, keeping things concise."

Since doing this event weekly can become routine, the hosts explain how different things keep it from becoming stale. "When you have somebody play a song for the first time and you know because of the audience's response, it will turn out to become a favorite among the [other performers]," Savlon said. "That's what an awesome night is."

"For me, it's when a night has a golden vibe where people aren't necessarily on it completely but they got a great reception and there was a good camaraderie in the house," Donnelly said. "Even if I don't get to play, I can feel a great atmosphere in the place and leave happy."

The Gulu-Gulu Café is open from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. weekdays; on weekends (including Wednesday and Thursday) it is open to 1 a.m. They can be contacted at (978) 740-8882.



Photo from Gulu Gulu website

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