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**Foraging**

## Come With an Empty Tank

Wednesday, April 7, 2004; Page F07

Say "fill 'er up" at the Fuel Co. in Charlottesville and you could mean your car or yourself. For your gas tank, there's the usual menu of three unleaded choices. For your tummy tank, however, there's so much more.

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Fill up at dinner with a blood orange martini, veal carpaccio appetizer, caramelized diver scallops with fingerling potatoes and a strawberry souffle for dessert.

In the morning, as your car gulps a few premium gallons, grab a cappuccino and scrambled eggs and bacon on a croissant for yourself. Lunchtime and you're registering empty? Try the grilled flank steak sandwich with arugula, roasted tomatoes and boursin cheese on ciabatta bread. While you're there, buy a container of lasagna and berry cobbler to heat up for dinner that night.



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The Fuel Co. is the newest offering from Virginia businesswoman and philanthropist Patricia Kluge. She and husband William Moses wanted a gas station that offered more than "horrid bathrooms and bad food," explains General Manager Ken Wooten. The Fuel Co., located a block from the pedestrian mall in Charlottesville's historic downtown area, is a gas station that offers everything from a simple cold soda to a freshly made sandwich and espresso to an elegant dinner.

The gas station/cafe/restaurant opened last November. At first there was only gasoline, plus an espresso bar and cafe. In December, an adjacent 50-seat restaurant began serving dinner. Last month, the restaurant began offering lunch on weekdays.

The cafe has become a popular place with nearby lawyers and office workers, who stop in for coffee and a muffin in the morning and take advantage of the small but comfortable seating area where a variety of newspapers are available. Sandwiches like the Vintner (smoked turkey, brie, Virginia apples and honey mustard on whole wheat bread for \$6.95) sell well at lunch. For those who want just a bottle of soda and a candy bar, there's a convenience store area in the cafe as well.

Business in the sophisticated restaurant, with its mahogany tables, chrome bar and \$18-\$31 dinner entrees has been slower, but the word is getting out, says Wooten. "People are realizing they can come to a gas station for a romantic meal."

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## -- Candy Sagon

*The Fuel Co., 901 East Market, Charlottesville. Call 434-220-0864.*

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