

## The Sweet Spots: Candy Stores of Abilene

If you feel the urge for something sweet while spending time in Abilene, satisfy your craving at one of the city's many candy stores. Brittles, fudge and everything chocolate are just a few of the delicious confections the city has to offer. Willy Wonka may not own any of Abilene's candy stores, but they are definitely the golden ticket to a candy paradise.

**Candies by Vletas**, in the heart of downtown, offers a casual and homey atmosphere with a variety of gourmet candies. They provide a little something for everyone. They make Brittles, pralines and dipped nuts, fruits and Oreos. Fudge and truffles come in a variety of different flavors. For those watching their diet, Vletas has many sugar-free candies. In the back where the candy is made, there is no machinery because all the candy is hand-made using no preservatives. Vletas, located at 1201 North First St., is family owned and operated by Pamala McCombs and her family. "You know when you're a kid you think there couldn't be anything better than owning a candy store," said McCombs. "It's even better than anybody can ever say." The most popular candy at Vletas is chocolate-covered pecans, said McCombs. There are so many different options picking a favorite would be difficult. "I have a favorite one day and then a different one the next," McCombs said. "Mine changes all the time." Vletas is nearly 100 years old. The namesake belongs to the Greek family that first opened the store in 1912. McCombs inherited Candies by Vletas and it moved to its current location in 1999. Today's store uses the same marble tables and copper pots used in 1912. [www.candiesbyvletas.com](http://www.candiesbyvletas.com)

**Sweet Retreat Chocolate** is found at 3602 North Clack. This is the place for chocolate lovers. They make treats of all kinds using white chocolate, dark chocolate and milk chocolate. Sweet Retreat's catch phrase is "delicious confections for discriminating tastes." Be the judge and try their dipped fruit and nuts or hand-made turtles. They will also personalize wedding favors and corporate gifts with unique packaging. For those with an adventurous tongue try a chocolate-dipped jalapeño. Sweet Retreat is candy with a cause. When you buy from them, you support Disability Resources Inc. (DRI). DRI is a non-profit organization providing housing and job opportunities to adults with developmental disabilities. Their mission is "to help developmentally disabled individuals achieve their full potential in a Christian environment."

**The Chocolate Box** is located inside the Mall of Abilene at 4310 Buffalo Gap Road. This store is a great place to take the kids. They do not just stop at chocolate. The candy bins display a wide variety with everything gummy, sweet and sour. The Chocolate Box also features many old-fashioned candies. These are the candies of the past that were loved by many as children. If they cannot be found anywhere else, the Chocolate Box is likely to have them. Another feature is the Chocolate Box's Candy Cupboard. It is the booth they have at all the local fairs and festivals. This year at the West Texas Fair they featured crickets in a wide variety of flavors. "The kids really get a kick out of them," said Mardene Bryson, owner of the Chocolate Box. The crickets were the real thing, not pretend. In store they have other bug creations for the brave to try. [www.facebook.com/TheChocolateBox](http://www.facebook.com/TheChocolateBox)

Candies by Vletas, Sweet Retreat Chocolate and the Chocolate Box are all candy staples of Abilene. Whether you are a first-time visitor or long-time resident, if you have a sweet tooth make sure to stop by these stores to get your fix.