

New Orleans
CITYBUSINESS

2010

CULINARY *Connoisseurs*



SPONSORED BY



Mercedes-Benz
Mercedes-Benz of New Orleans

New Orleans
CITY BUSINESS
2010
CULINARY
Connoisseurs

S P O N S O R E D B Y :

Ketel One®
VODKA



**GLAZER'S DISTRIBUTORS IS THE PROUD
DISTRIBUTOR FOR KETEL ONE VODKA IN LOUISIANA!**

The Nolet family has distilled Ketel One Vodka for over 300 years at the Nolet Distillery in Schiedam, Holland. Distilled from 100% wheat in alembic copper pot stills, filtered over loose charcoal, and rested in tile-lined tanks until ready, Ketel One Vodka is consistently named one of the world's top spirits for quality and taste. Ketel One Vodka is named after the original copper pot still, "Distilleerketel #1," and is handcrafted in small batches.

The alcohol content of this spirit is 80 proof.

Today's Specials

Introduction 5
 Past honorees 5
 Culinary Connoisseurs
 event photos 18

Best Executive Chefs

Andrea Appuzzo 6
 Frank Brigtsen 6
 Drew Dzejak 7
 Michael Farrell 7
 Chip Flanagan 8
 Dennis Hutley 8
 Erick Loos 9
 Matt Murphy 9
 Allison Vines-Rushing
 and Slade Rushing 10
 Alon Shaya 10

Best Sous Chefs

Bradley Akers 11
 Benjamin Thibodeaux 11

Best Pastry Chefs

Jean-Luc Albin 12
 Kristyne Bouley 12
 Shane Gorringe 13
 Shun Li 13

Best Bartenders

Marvin Allen 14
 Roger Blais 14
 Star Hodgson 15
 Chris McMillian 15

Best Fine Dining Establishments

Commander's Palace 16
 The Grill Room
 at Windsor Court Hotel 17
 Stella 17

Best Casual Upscale Establishments

Café Adelaide 22
 Domenica 22
 La Crepe Nanou 23
 Le Parvenu 23
 Rio Mar 24
 Trey Yuen 24
 Upperline 25
 Vizard's 25

Best Neighborhood Establishments

Five Happiness 26
 Joey K's 26

New Orleans Hamburger
 and Seafood Co. 27
 Parkway Bakery and Tavern 27
 Pizza Man 28
 R&O's 28
 Surrey's Café and Juice Bar 29

Best Manufacturers

Abita Brewing Co. 30
 Aunt Sally's Pralines 30
 Baumer Foods 31
 Hubig's Pies 31
 Magic Seasoning Blends 32

Best Owners

Paul, Scott and
 Steven Ballard 32
 Nick Bazan 33
 Larry Katz 33
 Gary Wollerman 34
 Jarred Zeringue 34

Legends

Ralph Brennan 35
 Randy Guste 35



COVER PHOTO BY FRANK AYIAMI



Published by the NOPG LLC
 111 Veterans Memorial Blvd.,
 Suite 1440, Metairie, La. 70005
 (504) 834-9292; Fax: (504) 837-2258

Publisher and president: D. Mark Singletary
Associate Publisher: Lisa Blossman
Managing Editor: Greg LaRose
News Editor: Christian Moises
Associate Editors: Autumn C. Giusti, Renee Aragon Dolese
Art Directors: Lisa Finnan and Alex Borges
Account executives: Liz Baldini, Monique Brignac,
 Jeanne Farrell-Bindewald, Cassie Foreman, Coco Evans Judd
Production manager: Julie Bernard



THE AWARDS THAT MEAN THE MOST TO US COME FROM OUR FELLOW NEW ORLEANIANS.

THE WINDSOR COURT HOTEL was the only hotel in New Orleans to win four CityBusiness Culinary Connoisseurs Awards. As a locally owned hotel, we are especially proud of receiving such accolades from the people who know us best. The Windsor Court was honored for:

DREW DZEJAK, EXECUTIVE CHEF
 SHUN LI, EXECUTIVE PASTRY CHEF

ROGER BLAIS, BARTENDER, THE POLO LOUNGE
 THE GRILL ROOM, BEST FINE DINING ESTABLISHMENT



WINDSOR COURT HOTEL

www.windsorcourthotel.com

300 Gravier Street | New Orleans, LA 70130 | 504-522-1992



THE FRANKS
CITY BUSINESS
2010
CULINARY
Connoisseurs

S P O N S O R E D B Y :

Maker's
S^{IV} Mark[®]



**GLAZER'S DISTRIBUTORS IS THE PROUD
DISTRIBUTOR FOR MAKER'S MARK IN LOUISIANA!**

At Maker's Mark we embrace a rich tradition of bourbon making that spans six generations. In fact, we're so proud of our family that we've developed a heritage team to travel the world educating folks on the finer points of Maker's Mark Bourbon and bourbon in general.

Introduction

2010 CULINARY CONNOISSEURS ARE TOAST OF THE TOWN



Christian Moises
News Editor

Two of the top things people throughout the country — and the world — think of when you say New Orleans are Mardi Gras and food.

Be it shrimp etouffée, a sloppy roast beef po-boy or fried lemon-filled pie, it's the stuff that puts us on the map and make people want to visit and live in south Louisiana.

It's only fitting we raise a glass to the people and restaurants that make those conversations so tasty with Culinary Connoisseurs, recognizing 50 top professionals and establishments in the region's culinary industry based on cuisine, business success and community involvement.

Honorees were recognized in 10 categories: best executive chefs, best sous chefs, best pastry chefs, best bartenders, best fine dining establishments, best casual upscale establishments, best neighborhood establishments, best manufacturers, best owners and legends.

Many people have heard of Paul Prudhomme, Susan Spicer and John Folse, but what about Otto Ramsey, the man behind Hubig's Pies, or Ralph's on the Park's Chip Flanagan, who loves to sneak Brussels

sprouts into a dish.

Did you know Rio Mar's Nick Bazan started out cleaning bathrooms and dishes at Shoney's. What about the peanut butter and jelly martini that Marvin Allen serves up at the Carousel Bar?

The professionals profiled in the following pages are the people who make our culinary industry famous, successful and one of the biggest reasons people worldwide visit our region.

In addition to countless hours of community service they provide to the community, these honorees have also made a commitment to support local business by frequenting area farmers' markets and seafood suppliers.

CityBusiness thanks each of them not only for their tasty contributions to the region but for their commitment to the New Orleans area.

Congratulations to the Culinary Connoisseurs of 2010. •

News Editor Christian Moises can be reached at 293-9249 or by e-mail at christian.moises@nopg.com.

Culinary Connoisseurs PAST HONOREES

2009

Best Fine Dining Establishments

Arnaud's
Emeril's Delmonico
Muriel's Jackson Square
Ralph's on the Park
Ruth's Chris Steakhouse

Best Casual Upscale Dining Establishments

Café Giovanni
Clancy's
Cochon
Dick and Jenny's
Herbsaint

Best Neighborhood Dining Establishments

Bear's Po-Boys
La Petite Grocery
Mandina's
Parasol's Restaurant and Bar
Radosta's
Salvo's Seafood and Deli

Best New Restaurants

Hostel New Orleans
Latil's Landing
Restaurant Amis
Restaurant Rambla

Best Caterers

Joel Catering
LaBella's Catering

Best Owners

John Besh and Octavio Mantilla
Dickie Brennan
Ralph Brennan
Emeril Lagasse
Duke LoCicero

Best Executive Chefs

Scott Boswell
Justin Devillier
Tenney Flynn
Brian Landry
Gus Martin
Jacques Saleun
David Slater

Best Sous Chefs

Emanuel Jones
Brandon Muetzel
Alfred Singleton
Heather Young

Best Sommeliers

Joe Briand

Best Pastry Chefs

Simone Fleming
Tariq Hanna
Dre McKindal

Laurent Moecklin
Marguerite Riehm

Best Maitre D's

Michael Juan

Legends

Ella Brennan

Lifetime Achievement

Sterling Constant
Sandy and Bob Defelice
Shirley Lee
Jorge Pesantes

2008

Best Fine Dining Establishments

Antoine's Restaurant
The Dakota Restaurant
August

Best Casual Upscale Dining Establishments

Drago's Seafood Restaurant
Lüke
Sal and Judy's
Tommy's Cuisine

Best Neighborhood Dining Establishments

Blue Duck Café

Byblos Restaurant
Deanie's Seafood— Bucktown
Mother's Restaurant

Best New Restaurants

5 Fifty 5
Lüke
MiLa
Nathan's Restaurant
New City Grille

Best Caterers

Fleur de lis New Orleans Cuisine
Food Art
Martin Wine Cellar
Patton's Caterers

Best Owners

John Besh
Tommy Cvitanovich
The Tastebuds: Greg Reggio, Hans Limburg, Gary Darling

Best Executive Chefs

Rene Bajoux
John Besh
Kim Kringlie
Brian Landry
Donald Link
Duke LoCicero
Spencer Minch
Darin Nesbit
Mike Regua

Susan Spicer

Best Sous Chefs

William Briand
Larry Herbert
Mike Nelson

Best Sommeliers

Michael Juan
Chris Ycaza

Best Pastry Chefs

Beth Biundo
Tariq Hanna
Chris Newton

Best Maitre D's

Robin Bordelon
Vedran Komazec
Sergio Lopez

Legends

Leah Chase
Paul Prudhomme

Lifetime Achievement

Shirley Anthony
Marie Laborde
Dalton Milton
Shirley Rubin

BEST *Executive Chefs*

ANDREA APPUZZO

Andrea's

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Age: 59

Family: single

Years at establishment: 25

At Andrea's Restaurant in Metairie, chef and owner Andrea Apuzzo serves northern Italian specialties and seafood.

"If the fish can't swim to the door, we don't prepare it," said Apuzzo, who celebrated Andrea's 25th anniversary in January. He opened the restaurant in 1985 with two cousins at the former Etienne's restaurant and then bought out his relatives. In the past decade, he has expanded the menu at Andrea's, added the Capri Blu piano lounge and built larger banquet rooms.

Apuzzo learned to cook at his grandmother's home and at the family's bakery in Anacapri, Italy. He was the first chef to bring northern Italian cuisine to New Orleans on a large scale, filling Andrea's menu with antipasto plates, shellfish, veal and homemade pastas. But there are many Louisiana items, too, such as gumbo and praline-pecan cheesecake.

He came to the Crescent City in 1977 to work as executive chef at the Royal Orleans Hotel. Earlier, Apuzzo was executive sous chef at the Omni International Hotel in Atlanta after

honing his skills at Princess hotels in Bermuda and Acapulco, Mexico, and at restaurants in Switzerland and Germany.

Apuzzo runs Andrea's almost nonstop, serving dinner daily.

He likes to chat with customers in the dining room and has watched their children become adults over the years. On major holidays, the restaurant is heavily booked with families who are mostly repeat customers.

Apuzzo donates his talents to Children's Hospital, Jefferson Dollars for Scholars and the American Heart Association. He performs cooking demonstrations at local schools in addition to providing food for the annual Easter Seals' Jazz on the Bayou fundraiser in Slidell.

He's also involved in Cancer Crusaders, Crimestoppers, St. Michael's School and, in 1979, opened a school to teach young people how to cook, which later became Delgado Community College's culinary school.

A Metairie resident, Apuzzo grows herbs, vegetables, fruits and flowers at his home and is an authority on flavors and freshness. His third cookbook, called "My Home is Your Home," was published in 2006 and emphasizes flavors in soups, stews and braised meats. •

— Susan Buchanan



BEST *Executive Chefs*

FRANK BRIGTSEN

Charlie's Seafood and Brigtsen's Restaurant

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Age: 55

Family: wife, Marna

Years at establishment: 24

Chef Frank Brigtsen has two culinary passions: cooking Louisiana seafood and cooking it in New Orleans. So when the opportunity arose last year to revive Charlie's Seafood in Harahan, the Creole-focused chef and his wife, Marna, couldn't pass it up.

"We never really wanted a second restaurant in our 24 years of business, but this was a special opportunity," Brigtsen said. "Charlie's was a neighborhood restaurant I grew up around and one of the first restaurants I ate in. Neighborhood restaurants in New Orleans are a precious, rare commodity lately, and I didn't want to see it go."

Brigtsen reopened Charlie's Seafood in July, serving fried, boiled and grilled seafood — what he collectively calls "Frank food."

His namesake restaurant in Carrollton, Brigtsen's, opened in 1986 on Dante Street, specializing in Louisiana Creole dishes that incorporate local ingredients and specials that change throughout the seafood seasons.

"My favorite dish to cook in the restaurant is filé gumbo," Brigtsen said, "a perfect example of the beauty of Louisiana cuisine and adding all kinds of local ingredients to create a dish that is satisfying."

Brigtsen said he realized he would be a chef in 1979 when he apprenticed at Commander's Palace under chef Paul Prudhomme. In 1980, Brigtsen became the night chef at K-Paul's Louisiana Kitchen and later executive chef. In 1986, Prudhomme and his late wife, Kay,



loaned Brigtsen the money to open his own restaurant.

"Everything I know about food and the business of running a restaurant I learned from him and Kay," he said. "He taught me the gratification of being a cook and making people happy with food."

In the community, Brigtsen donates time to Share Our Strength's Taste of the Nation and the Chefs' Charity for St. Michael's School. In 2006, Brigtsen accepted the Humanitarian Award from the James

Beard Foundation on behalf of New Orleans restaurateurs for their role in the Hurricane Katrina recovery.

"Leah Chase and I accepted the award for several chefs, and we were able to say a few words and speak to everybody about New Orleans, urging them to come back to our city and repopulate our restaurants." •

— Tommy Santora

BEST
Executive
Chefs

DREW DZEJAK

The Grill Room at Windsor Court Hotel

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Age: 30

Family: wife, Stephanie

Years at establishment: one and a half

Cooking for Easter and Christmas were daylong events at Drew Dzejak's childhood Florida home.

The glunkie cabbage rolls, babka Easter bread, chrusciki deep-fried cookies and other traditional Polish treats he made with his grandmother and uncle are among memories that shaped Dzejak's desire to cook.

The glunkie, dough rolled thickly, cut, twisted, deep-fried and covered in powdered sugar is similar to the New Orleans beignet, except the Polish treat ends up a flat, crisp cookie instead of a soft doughnut.

When it came time to pick a profession, Dzejak said there was no other option.

"Only one thing came to mind, and that's the only thing I've ever done," he said. "I can cook and that's it."

But the Windsor Court executive chef claims no signature dish.

"I love cooking food," he said. "I wouldn't say Creole, Asian or American. I cook it all. Good food, that's my specialty. I change the menu too much to have a signature dish."

If anything, Dzejak enjoys cooking potato dishes of any kind and foie gras made with calf liver, he said.

He's often in the kitchen from 9 a.m. until 10 p.m. but said he enjoys the camaraderie with customers, learning what their favorite dish is and preparing it to perfection just for them.



"I don't know what's so pleasing about it, but it is," he said. "There's a level of satisfaction in making something that someone loves."

After cooking all day, he goes home and walks and plays with his three dogs, Sammy, a German shepherd and Alaskan husky mix; Lucy, a hound mix; and Daisy, a Great Dane.

All of his community work revolves around cooking. He prepares food for the Children's Hospital Sugar Plum Ball, the New Orleans Museum of Art's Art in Bloom event, March of Dimes fundraisers and functions for the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. •

—Diana Chandler

BEST
Executive
Chefs

MICHAEL FARRELL

Le Meritage at the Maison Dupuy Hotel

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Age: 44

Family: wife, Gina Ciolino; children, Edi, 4

Years at establishment: one

Michael Farrell believes a superb dining experience is more than just great food.

"The food can actually be fantastic," said Farrell, executive chef of Le Meritage at the Maison Dupuy Hotel. "But if the service is not up to standards or the general ambiance is not what it could be, the food alone will not overcome that."

That's why Farrell, who signed on at the Maison Dupuy in January 2009, tries to keep his finger on the pulse of virtually everything that goes on at Le Meritage.

"I realized early on in this business that if you expect to succeed, no detail should escape your eye: from how the tables are set and what kind of flowers are used, to the music, how the guests are greeted and how the menu is explained," he said. "It's like putting on a Broadway show every night, making sure that everyone knows their parts and that everything is flowing and moving correctly."

Farrell comes by what he calls his "larger vision" naturally. He owned a restaurant in

Nantucket, Mass., called the Summer House for the better part of a decade and has logged more than 25 years in the industry, starting out as a dishwasher and prep cook.

"I really worked my way up in the business and along the way learned everything that I could about both the front and back of the house," Farrell said.

Farrell's experience has also given shape and substance to Le Meritage's menu, which features a variety of what he calls "Southern coastal cuisine."

"Because I've spent time in places like Virginia and the Carolinas, as well as Florida, I've experienced the truly wonderful variety of Southern foods and decided to use flavors from across the region in the menu here."

That means Le Meritage's menu includes staples from New Orleans, quail from Mississippi, fish from the Gulf of Mexico and lots of local oysters.

"When you think about all of that, how much more Southern can you get?" he said.

Farrell also lends his culinary skills to fundraisers for the March of Dimes and Longue Vue House and Gardens. •

—Garry Boulard



BEST
*Executive
Chefs*

CHIP FLANAGAN

Ralph's on the Park

PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMI



Age: 41

Family: wife, Deborah; son, Jack, 2

Years at establishment: four and a half

For most people, college jobs are a way to make a little spending money or to pay tuition and do not usually turn into a career.

But for Chip Flanagan, it did.

Flanagan began his restaurant career when he was attending New York University, busing tables before moving into the kitchen to prep vegetables. He enjoyed the work but didn't realize it would be his calling.

"I didn't even think of it as a profession," Flanagan said. "It was something I did as a student for cash."

However, Flanagan's thoughts kept going back to the kitchen work he did in college.

"You do some soul searching in your 20s, and that was what I came up with," Flanagan said.

He enrolled at Delgado Community College's Culinary Institute and began his training as a chef. His career would lead him to Ralph's on the Park, just a few blocks away from where he trained at Delgado.

One of the things Flanagan enjoys most about his job at Ralph's is helping customers expand their culinary comfort zones.

"Sometimes people form rigid eating habits," Flanagan said.

"They see a certain word (in the menu description) and don't want to order it. But if they actually try it, they love it."

Flanagan has a few tricks up his sleeve to accomplish that. If a

customer orders a steak, sometimes he'll garnish it with a brussel sprout. The customers don't always eat it, but when they do, they're exposed to a vegetable that often gets a bad rap, he said.

Sometimes, a server will tell Flanagan a customer is curious about a certain dish but is afraid to order it. If that happens, he'll send out a small sample for the customer to try to see if they like it.

Flanagan also does a great deal of charity work, with his favorite

organizations being Children's Hospital and City Park. Because Ralph's on the Park takes its name from the landmark across the street, Flanagan said he feels a connection to City Park and a desire to give back to the neighborhood where it is located.

"Mid-City is a tight-knit, smaller community and we owe it," Flanagan said. •

— Fritz Esker

BEST
*Executive
Chefs*

DENNIS HUTLEY

Le Parvenu

PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMI



Age: 58

Family: wife, Kelly

Years at establishment: 14

One could say Chef Dennis Hutley, owner and head chef at Le Parvenu restaurant in Kenner, found his way to the kitchen on the tennis court.

Hutley, who was about 19 or 20 at the time, was working as an assistant to an electrician the club hired to install lighting around the courts.

"I was searching for a career," said Hutley, who at the time had a couple of semesters of college studies in business administration under his belt and had spent a good two years trying unsuccessfully to determine what he wanted to do with his life. "I was kind of bored."

So when a club manager who had taken a liking to Hutley and his work ethic approached him about filling in for some kitchen workers in the club's restaurant, he jumped at the chance, despite not having any notable cooking experience.

"From the get-go, I kind of fell in love with it," Hutley said. "The cooking, the creating, the logistics, the production. Everything kind of fit

my demeanor as far as what I like to do: organize and create."

He brought home a "Joy of Cooking" cookbook and studied it like a textbook "because I didn't know anything about cooking," Hutley said.

About a year later, he said he walked into the since-shuttered Masson's Restaurant Francais in Lakeview to inquire about an opening for a lunch cook. He was hired and spent three years at the restaurant, a stretch of time he counts among the most seminal in a career that would take him to several of the city's top fine dining venues, including a 15-year tenure at the since-closed Versailles Restaurant on St. Charles Avenue.

Hutley opened his American Creole restaurant Le Parvenu in a former Kenner coffee shop in 1996, its moniker a nod to his sense of humor and his unconventional path to the business.

"It's distasteful slang in French," he said. "It means brash upstart, a little sassy. I used it in the sense that I was new on the scene out here. I'm a little sassy, too, but I just thought it was a cute name." •

— Emilie Bahr

BEST *Executive Chefs*

ERICK LOOS

La Provence

PHOTO BY SHANNON DIECIQUE

Age: 25

Family: wife, Jennifer Hough-Loos

Years at establishment: one

Originally from Long Beach, Calif., Chef Eric Loos of La Provence in Lacombe said he moved to the New Orleans area fresh out of culinary school on the recommendation of several mentors.

"The rich food history of this area was always an inspiration for me," Loos said. "The fact that people here plan events and holidays around food, it is a chef's dream."

Loos' career in the culinary arts began as a teen in the kitchen of a Red Lobster restaurant near his home. He said the intensity of the kitchen atmosphere was the driving force behind his desire to enter the industry.

"It was a passion and still is," Loos said. "In high school, while the rest of my classmates were learning graphic design tactics, I was drawing pictures of food."

Additional inspiration came from his mother, brother and stepfather, who all at one time worked at restaurant job. Loos' wife, Jennifer, works as a pastry chef in New Orleans.

"It's neat to talk about work with my mother and brother," Loos said. "There is a real good connection there where we can bounce ideas off each other and expand our abilities."

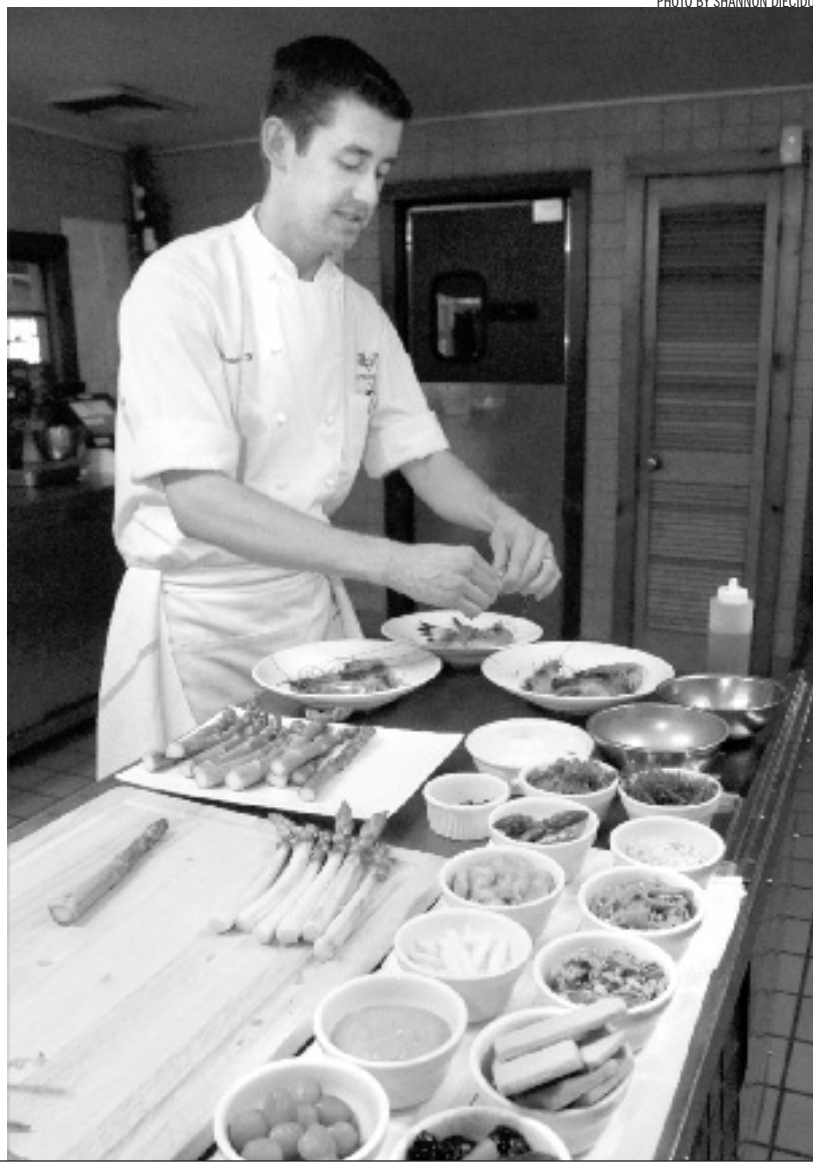
Loos said his specialty at La Provence is seafood and traditional French cuisine that features his personal spin. His ingredients are local, coming from neighborhood farmers markets or from the restaurant's on-site garden.

"I collect eggs every morning from hens that I raised from 3-day-old chicks," Loos said. "We also have a pen full of about 30 Mangao Itsa pigs from Hungary. The pigs feed off organic scraps from the restaurant and have an unbelievable fat-developing capability. They provide an endless supply of fresh pork and bacon."

Loos said he is a true believer the biodynamic farm and growing practices used at La Provence. In addition to maintaining the gardens and farm at the restaurant, he educates the community on the techniques at farmers markets around St. Tammany Parish.

He also contributes to St. Joseph's altars at various churches throughout the North Shore. •

— Robin Shannon



BEST *Executive Chefs*

MATT MURPHY

The Ritz-Carlton New Orleans

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Age: 42

Family: wife, Alicia; quadruplets, Molly, Margaret, Elizabeth, Carolyn, 2, Alanna, 6 months

Years at establishment: seven

Matt Murphy, executive chef at The Ritz-Carlton New Orleans, uses produce from Louisiana growers, supports farmers' markets and tries to do all he can for the city that helped him pull through a debilitating disease last year.

"I'm a strong believer in the farm-to-table concept and enjoy incorporating it into bistro-style foods," he said.

In Murphy's honor, the Ritz changed the name of its flagship eatery, Melange Restaurant, to M Bistro last year and adjusted rules so he could deal with small, regional suppliers. Dishes such as Louisiana P&J oyster and artichoke chowder and braised Louisiana rabbit lasagna on the dinner menu reflect his devotion to in-state producers.

Murphy teamed with NOW Farms in Bush to use M Bistro's organic and biodegradable waste as compost at the farm, making M Bistro the only major New Orleans eatery involved in composting.

Murphy's been back at the Ritz since October, after undergoing 19 operations last year to fight a bacterial blood infection that sent him into a month long coma. That ordeal was the result of a slip-and-fall accident for the athletic Murphy, who has long played rugby.

"People here, the chefs and the hospitality community, did so much for me when I got sick," he said. "I owe an awful lot to this city."

In June, local chefs and the Ritz held a fundraiser on his behalf.

The father of quadruplet girls and a baby, Murphy said that when he's "out cheffing" during long days, his wife, Alicia, is the rock holding their family together.



Ritz-Carlton Executive Chef Matt Murphy with his quadruplet daughters, from left: Carolyn, Molly, Elizabeth and Margaret.

Born in Ireland, Murphy worked in acclaimed restaurants in Europe and Asia and later became a sous chef in New Orleans for chef Jamie Shannon at Commander's Palace.

At the Ritz, Murphy oversees a culinary team responsible for the hotel's restaurant, banquets, catering, in-room dining and pastry

kitchens. He helps local nonprofits whenever he can and served Thanksgiving dinner to the homeless at Bridge House. He's also active with programs at Bridge House, United Way, Café Reconcile, local farmers' markets and Delgado Community College. •

— Susan Buchanan

BEST *Executive Chefs*

SLADE RUSHING AND ALLISON VINES-RUSHING

MiLa

Age: Slade, 36, Allison, 34

Family: bloodhounds, Tupelo, Winona, Ruby and Rufus; cat, Bocuse

Years at establishment: two

In a traditional marriage, one spouse usually does most of the cooking, while the other does most of the eating.

But there's enough room in the kitchen for Slade Rushing and Allison Vines-Rushing, the husband-and-wife executive chef team who has parlayed their cooking talents into a business success at MiLa, a contemporary Southern fare restaurant in the Pere Marquette Hotel.

MiLa, which is named after the first and last letter of each of their home states — Mississippi for Slade and Louisiana for Allison — combines the cuisine from each state and incorporates French techniques. The seasonal menu is driven by local produce delivered weekly from Lujele Farms, based in Mount Hermon in Washington Parish.

"Our technique and style can best be seen through our New Orleans-style Barbecue Lobster and the Oyster Rockefeller 'Deconstructed,' the most popular items on the menu," Allison said. "Both dishes are a good example of our re-styled, classic regional dishes, and our other dishes are always changing seasonally to keep our creativity stimulated and to make the most of local ingredients."

This is not the first restaurant venture for the married duo in Louisiana. In early 2005, they were the executive chefs at Longbranch in Abita Springs. But the business venture only lasted through June 2007 when the married couple decided they "just didn't find enough customers" on the North Shore but promised they would be back on the culinary scene.

Slade and Allison met while working at Gerard's Downtown in New Orleans and decided to move to Manhattan to pursue chef careers.



PHOTO BY FRANK AYMANI

In 2003, Allison accepted a job as opening chef at Jack's Luxury Oyster Bar in the East Village. One year later, Slade joined Allison as co-chef who was named a Rising Star Chef of the Year by the James Beard Foundation.

"Our experience opening a restaurant in New York City really prepared us for where we are today," Allison said. "Slade and I went into it totally green from a business standpoint. We just knew

that we both loved to cook, and we shared the same vision."

In the community, Slade and Allison donate time to the Culinary Canine Calendar benefiting the Southern Animal Foundation, Court Appointed Special Advocates, Children's Miracle Network, Grace House, Taste of the NFL, New Orleans Museum of Art and Roots of Music. •

—Tommy Santora

BEST *Executive Chefs*

ALON SHAYA

Domenica

Age: 31

Family: single

Time at Domenica: six months

As a child growing up near Philadelphia, Alon Shaya spent many afternoons buying groceries and starting dinner in preparation for his mother's return from work.

"That was when I was in first grade," Shaya said.

The executive chef and co-owner of Domenica credits his mother and grandmother, who brought him to the United States from Israel when he was 4, for fostering his passion for food.

But he said it was Donna Tarcov, his ninth-grade home economics teacher at Harrington High School in Rosemont, Penn., who inspired him to work in the restaurant business.

"At that point of my life, she was one of the only teachers that ... believed in me and she got me my first restaurant job," Shaya said, which was washing dishes at an Italian restaurant in Philadelphia in 1995.

He claims Italian food as his specialty because, he said, he is intrigued by the regional cuisine and rich cultural traditions that inspired it.

"I was born in Israel so the Mediterranean flavors come very natural to me," he said. "A lot of the ingredients are very similar between Italy and Israel. Chickpeas, eggplant, roasted peppers, olives, olive oil, all these cross over a lot between the two cuisines."

His specialty is bringing authentic regional dishes from Italy and re-creating them with New Orleans ingredients. Salumi and other cured meats used in Shaya's menu at Domenica are a favorite.



PHOTO BY FRANK AYMANI

"We have an extensive cured meat program, and it has gotten a very good response from our guests," Shaya said. "I will sometimes make hummus and serve that on our sliced meat and antipasti platter."

Shaya also enjoys teaching children to cook. He volunteers with New Orleans Outreach, cooking healthy meals for children in the classroom and promoting food preparation as an ideal way to bond

parents with their families.

He also worked with Besh Restaurant Group to feed 40,000 people in Orange, Texas, who were affected by Hurricane Ike in 2008.

"We lived out of a parking lot and served hot meals to people who lost their homes or had no way to provide food for their families," he said. •

—Diana Chandler

BEST *Sous Chefs*

BRADLEY AKERS

Café Giovanni

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Age: 32

Family: wife, Eliza Moritz-Akers

Years at establishment: four

Bradley Akers claims he is nothing without the help of his fellow workers.

"I've learned a lot from other cooks and chefs in this business," said Akers, who left his position as sous chef at Café Giovanni in March to become executive chef at The Columns Hotel.

"It has to be a team effort in any kitchen," Akers said, "and that is especially true when there are a lot of pressures. We all lean on each other when we need to."

But Akers didn't become one of the city's most respected sous chefs simply because he was an amiable person. Instead, his reputation is based on the skills and imagination he brought to the unique Creole/Italian menu at Café Giovanni.

On any given night, the restaurant's specials were Akers-inspired creations that pay homage to Café Giovanni's traditions.

"A lot of this has to do with chef Duke

(LoCicero)," Akers said of Café Giovanni's owner.

"He really took me under his wing . . . and pulled me into the Creole Italian direction. But probably the most important thing is that he has also given me the freedom to create on my own."

The idea of turning a love into a profession came after Akers read the results of an aptitude test he had taken.

"It said that one of the top things that I would be good at was a chef," Akers said. "I thought about it for a long time before getting a job in a little steak house and greatly enjoying the experience."

Shortly thereafter, Akers graduated from Culinard, the Culinary Institute of Virginia College in Birmingham, Ala., and moved to New Orleans, where he went to work for Café Giovanni.

With the exception of stint at Restaurant Anatole, Akers worked at Café Giovanni for four years.

"I enjoy everything about it: the creativity, the pressures, the nervousness you sometimes feel when you are particularly busy," Akers said. •

— Garry Boulard



BEST *Sous Chefs*

BENJAMIN THIBODEAUX

Palace Café

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Age: 30

Family: fiancée, Audrey

Years at establishment: four

Cooking has always been a part of Ben Thibodeaux's life. One of his earliest memories is making biscuits as a 3-year-old in Lafayette. Rolling the dough, covered in flour, he fell in love with cooking from the start.

"And I still love cooking biscuits," Thibodeaux said.

In fact, biscuits are a staple of the employee meals he cooks for the staff at Palace Café.

His love of cooking continued to grow throughout childhood. After he worked started working in the food industry at age 15, Thibodeaux realized it was the path for him.

"I knew cubicles weren't for me," Thibodeaux said.

Now, as chef de cuisine at Palace Café, Thibodeaux looks to merge the down-home cooking of his youth with more elegant, traditional New Orleans dishes. His cooking has even earned him awards, including the title of "Hot and Spicy Iron Chef" at the 2009 Hot and Spicy Festival in Toronto. The winning dish was New Orleans-style

barbecued oysters served over a grilled rib-eye.

While Thibodeaux has served many people, Oscar-winning actor Sidney Poitier sticks out in his memory. He recalled suggesting items for Poitier and mentioning a panzanella salad. Poitier looked at Thibodeaux, smiled and said, "Mmm ... panzanella."

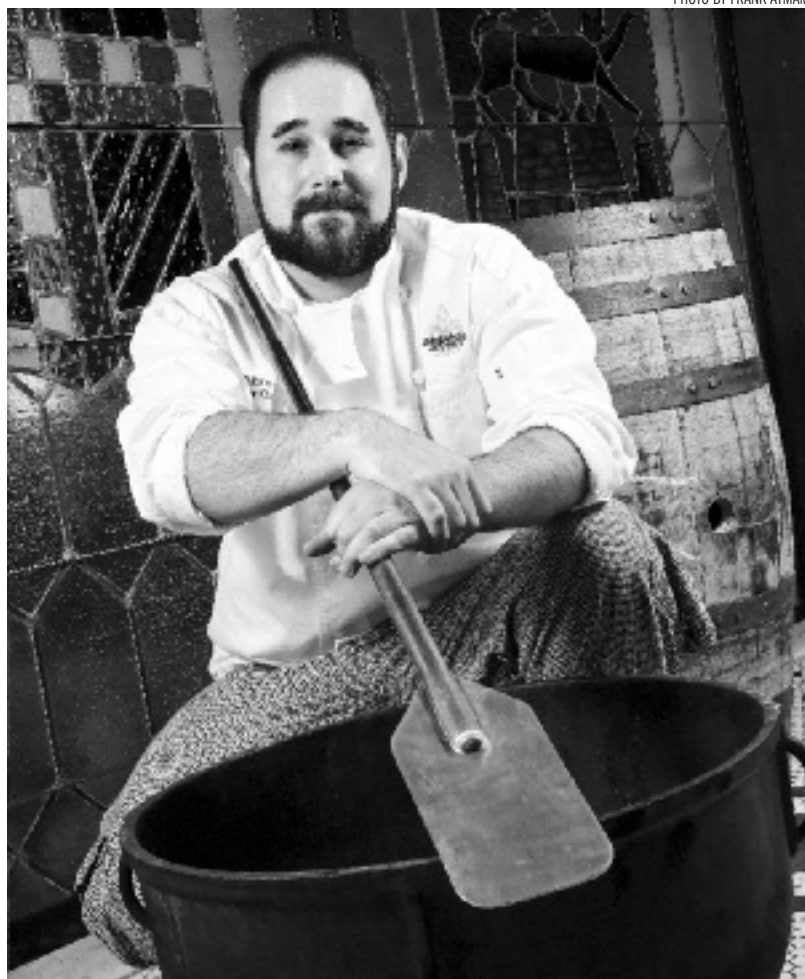
Thibodeaux not only puts his cooking skills to use for Palace Café and for international competitions, but for charity as well. Every year, he helps judge the Acadiana Culinary Classic in Lafayette, whose proceeds benefit Stuller's Place, a nonprofit that provides support services for sexually abused children and adults.

And within the restaurant itself, Thibodeaux loves mentoring younger staff members and creating a work environment that encourages growth and learning amongst young people looking for a foothold in the culinary industry.

While Thibodeaux loves cooking, he does not have a favorite dish to cook, but he does have a favorite one to eat: boiled crawfish.

"If I ever did anything really bad and needed a last meal, I'd want a crawfish boil," Thibodeaux said. •

— Fritz Esker



BEST
Pastry Chefs

JEAN-LUC ALBIN

Maurice French Pastries

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Age: 58

Family: wife, Marlene; children, Lilli Margaux Albin, 22, Jean-Henri Albin, 24

Years at establishment: 22

Jean-Luc Albin's affinity for the kitchen was clear when he was a child. Albin grew up in a small French town, his father a professional chef and his mother "an excellent cook," he said, with whom he preferred spending much of his free time. At 14, he decided to make cooking his career.

He started as an apprentice and worked at restaurants throughout the French countryside before landing at the famed Hotel Georges V in Paris.

After a stint in the French Navy, Albin set his sights on the United States, where a certain cache was reserved for French chefs. After obtaining the requisite permits, he moved to Bermuda, where he later was recruited to work at the Omni Hotel in Atlanta.

As a reward for his efforts, Albin was offered a trip anywhere in the country. He opted for New Orleans, having heard about the city's rich culture and French influence. In 1978, he moved to the Crescent City to work at the Fairmont Hotel.

After leaving for about five years for other jobs, Albin returned to New Orleans in 1988. Months later, he joined his friend, Maurice Ravet, founder of Maurice French Pastries, in his bakery business. The following year, he bought the company.

Today, Albin operates two Maurice French Pastries outlets with the help of his wife, Marlene, who runs the satellite branch on West Napoleon Avenue in Metairie while he does most of the baking at the main location on Hessmer Avenue.

Most days, he's at work by 3 a.m. and is usually in bed by



8:30 p.m., except when the Hornets are playing so he can stay up to watch the game.

Albin churns out all variety of delectable eats, but among his favorite creations are his cakes. He has sent his king cakes to new presidents, as Carnival overlaps with the inauguration, with one of his more novel creations inspired by President Obama.

For his inauguration, Albin opted against a traditional purple, green and gold cake and sent one with fudge icing topped in red, white and blue sprinkles with a black baby inside and a tiny American flag on top. So far, he hasn't heard from Obama about the cake.

"Maybe he didn't get it," Albin said. •

— Emilie Bahr

BEST
Pastry Chefs

KRISTYNE BOULEY

Link Restaurant Group

PHOTO BY SHANNON DIECIEUE

Age: 33

Family: husband, Andrew Scurlock

Years at establishment: two and a half

When pastry chef Kristyne Bouley was pursuing a position with Link Restaurant Group in 2007, she presented a tasting menu of salt-and-peppered buttermilk crackers and a cornmeal pound cake topped with lemon curd.

Bouley said chef and owner Donald Link told her, "That's just what I want to eat," and hired her to make desserts at Herbsaint. A few years later, Bouley moved into a dedicated kitchen and now oversees the pastry and bread programs for all of Link's restaurants: Herbsaint, Cochon, Cochon Butcher and Calcasieu.

Bouley's background as a chef meshes with Link's, as well as that of restaurant partner-chefs Warren Stephens and Stephen Stryjewski.

"I make rustic, flavor-driven food," Bouley said. Examples include her signature green tomato fried pie, a more textured take on the traditional apple version, and a citrus parfait made with layers of Southern pound cake, Ponchatoula blood oranges, tart lemon curd and slightly sweet cr me fra che.

Raised in Maine, Bouley cooked professionally to pay for college. She moved to the New

England Culinary Institute, where she impressed one of the school's "scarier instructors" with her skill cooking seitan, or wheat gluten, searing it and serving it with a beet and miso marinara.

After graduating, Bouley worked as a line cook at Prune Restaurant in New York. When its pastry chef left, Bouley saw an opportunity.

"I said that I could do it, and the chef gave me a chance," Bouley said.

Years later came her meeting with Link, and things clicked.

When it comes to new dessert ideas, everyone collaborates, Bouley said.

"That's what working in a restaurant should ideally be about."

Many of Bouley's creations are planned — strawberry shortcake, almond panna cotta, pavlova or a lemon poppy seed cake with a fruit center and lemon buttercream frosting. But some of her more popular items happen by accident.

Take her bacon pralines. After forgetting candied bacon for a salad garnish in the oven, Bouley threw the crystallized concoction back in the pot and transformed it into the savory-sweet confection.

"It helps that we have very high quality bacon," she said. •

— Anne Berry



BEST *Pastry Chefs*

SHANE GORRINGE

Zoe's Bakery

PHOTO BY SHANNON DIECIDUE

Age: 50

Family: wife, Enid; children, Thomas, 20, Zoe, 18, Benjamin, 9
Years at establishment: 15

At Zoe's Bakery in Covington, owner and pastry chef Shane Gorringe can transform almost any theme or vision — such as a movie, dinosaurs, football or fishing — into an elegant cake or a whimsical party room.

Born in England, Gorringe been creating pastries since he apprenticed at the age of 15 at an Austrian shop in south London. These days, he oversees “a very loyal staff of 25 to 30” on the North Shore, making European-style tarts, specialty cakes and pies, and planning parties and events.

Gorringe set up shop in Covington in 1995 after years as a pastry chef at Windsor Court Hotel in New Orleans. Before that, he honed his skills as assistant pastry chef at hotels in Europe, Venezuela and the Middle East.

On the “Great Chefs of the South” television series, he has dazzled viewers by making confections such as Coffee Cup Sabayon and Chocolate Demerar. Some of his recipes are in the show's cookbook. Dessert lovers who watch the series, and others such as “Cake Boss” and “Ultimate Cake Off,” head to Zoe's with orders, he said.

“But then it's tough for us since the customers have no idea how much labor goes into some of those big cakes,” Gorringe said, adding that prices for extravagant cakes can start at \$800 and reach more than \$1,500.

Gorringe donates his talents to schools and charities and has created confections for fundraisers to build the Children's Museum of St. Tammany, turning movies such as “Willy Wonka and the



Chocolate Factory” and “Night at the Museum” into cakes and sugary figures.

Finding enough staff for Zoe's can be difficult because pastry makers are specialized and in short supply, Gorringe said. But he has done plenty of training in his time, judging by the number of pastry chefs in Louisiana and throughout the country who attribute

their success to his tutelage.

Jennifer Melancon, executive cake designer at Sophi P. Cakes in Lafayette, and Katherine Clapner, executive pastry chef at Stephan Pyles Restaurant in Dallas, are among the professionals who trained under Gorringe. •

— Susan Buchanan

BEST *Pastry Chefs*

SHUN LI

The Grill Room at Windsor Court Hotel

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Age: 32

Family: single

Years at establishment: one and a half

Pastry chef Shun Li likes to change up the dessert menu at The Grill Room at Windsor Court Hotel depending on what fruits are in season.

“On my winter menu ... is a deconstructed apple pie,” he said when interviewed earlier this year. He describes the dish as a complex concoction of Fuji apples, caramel, puff pastry and apple cider fluid gel.

As sophisticated as his restaurant creations are, Li said his favorite dessert to bake at home is a basic pound cake.

“It's simple, and it's really good with a lot of different things,” he said. “I'll add some fruits that I have around the house, some cream and that's it.”

While a Grill Room dessert can sometimes take days to prepare, Li said he finds baking bread a more relaxing and quickly gratifying pursuit.

“Let's say one plate has six different components,” he said. “Sometimes it takes me a day and a half just to make all the individual compo-

nents, and then I have to wait another day to put it all together and see how it works. But with bread, I can make it in the morning, and by the afternoon I can bake it and see the results.”

A graduate of Johnson and Wales University with a degree in baking and pastry, Li has worked with such nationally renowned chefs as Ken Vedriniski at the Sienna Restaurant in Charleston, S.C., and World Pastry Cup winner Laurant L'Huillier.

“I'm so glad that I had a chance to work under those chefs to get my foundation, so that from there I could add on to my skills,” Li said.

Television chefs, such as famed chocolate gourmet Jacques Torres, inspired Li's entrée into the culinary profession. In the years since, he has worked to create a style of his own.

“I'm still kind of finding my own voice, so to speak,” Li said. “Usually all my stuff is clean, and I try to be not too sweet. I always find that sweetness is easy; you just put more sugar into (a dish). But what dessert is all about to me is to use the sweetness to accentuate all the other ingredients.” •

— Sonya Stinson



BEST *Bartenders*

MARVIN ALLEN

Carousel Bar

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Age: 57

Family: single

Years at establishment: eight

The idea that a cocktail can affect a football team's success crossed Carousel Bar mixologist Marvin Allen's mind after he created the Dr. Bill's Who Dat Experience.

The Saints began a three-game losing streak the weekend Allen served the cocktail, created in honor of the Unknown Who Dat fan, Bill Harris, spotted at FedEx Stadium among a sea of Washington Redskins fans during the Saints' 33-30 comeback victory in December.

Allen served the cocktail during a celebration for Harris on Dec. 18 at the Monteleone Hotel, the weekend of the Saints' loss to the Dallas Cowboys.

"I quit making it because that was the first game we lost. That was the start of a three-game losing streak we had," Allen said. "With Saints fans, we're all kind of superstitious. And I'll even admit to that myself."

The lemon Vodka creation, garnished in black and gold with a lemon slice and a blackberry, is one of many Allen creations. Among them are his truffletini, a dessert cocktail with his favorite combination of chocolate and raspberry, and his peanut butter and jelly martini, made with passion fruit Vodka, black cherry grape juice, blackberry preserves and garnished with a peanut butter cream and crushed peanuts.

"A lot of times it's getting a product from the liquor company and seeing what I can do with it," Allen said. "People drinking want to be more adventurous."

Still, Allen said he's best known for putting a twist on old



favorites, such as his version of the Sazerac, which he makes with the traditional rye whiskey and Cognac, the original brandy used in the New Orleans creation.

Allen shows concern for his customers' safety as a certified Responsible Server Trainer, a state-mandated course teaching mixers

and servers how to handle customers who want to drink too much.

Allen is a graduate of the Pernod Ricard USA BarSmarts training program and completed three years of business management education at Saginaw Valley State University in Saginaw, Mich. •

— Diana Chandler

BEST *Bartenders*

ROGER BLAIS

The Polo Club Lounge at Windsor Court Hotel

PHOTO BY SHANNON DIECIDUE

Age: 56

Family: wife, Rose

Years at establishment: 16

A veteran bartender at the Polo Club Lounge at Windsor Court Hotel, Roger Blais traces his bartending days back to when he was a freshman in college.

Born and raised on a small dairy farm in New York, Blais said his world changed when he landed a barbacking job in a nightclub when he was 18. He bounced in and out of bartending over the years and after an eight-year stint working offshore in Lafayette, he moved to New Orleans and dived back into the career that was his first calling.

"I just always fell back on bartending, and it has produced a great life for me," Blais said. "I've always enjoyed the excitement."

While he considers his best drink to be an Alexander, a mix of gin, crème de cacao and cream, "a lot of people think I make the best Sazerac in town," he said.

At the Polo Club Lounge, Blais serves fine drinks in an upscale environment to a diverse clientele including tourists, the business crowd and romantic couples. Blais said successful bartenders need to know a little bit of everything,

including not only how to make drinks but how to read customers and hold the right conversations.

"There are people who come in to be entertained, and there are people who just want to be waited on. Discretion in this business is also huge and there's trust involved with that," Blais said.

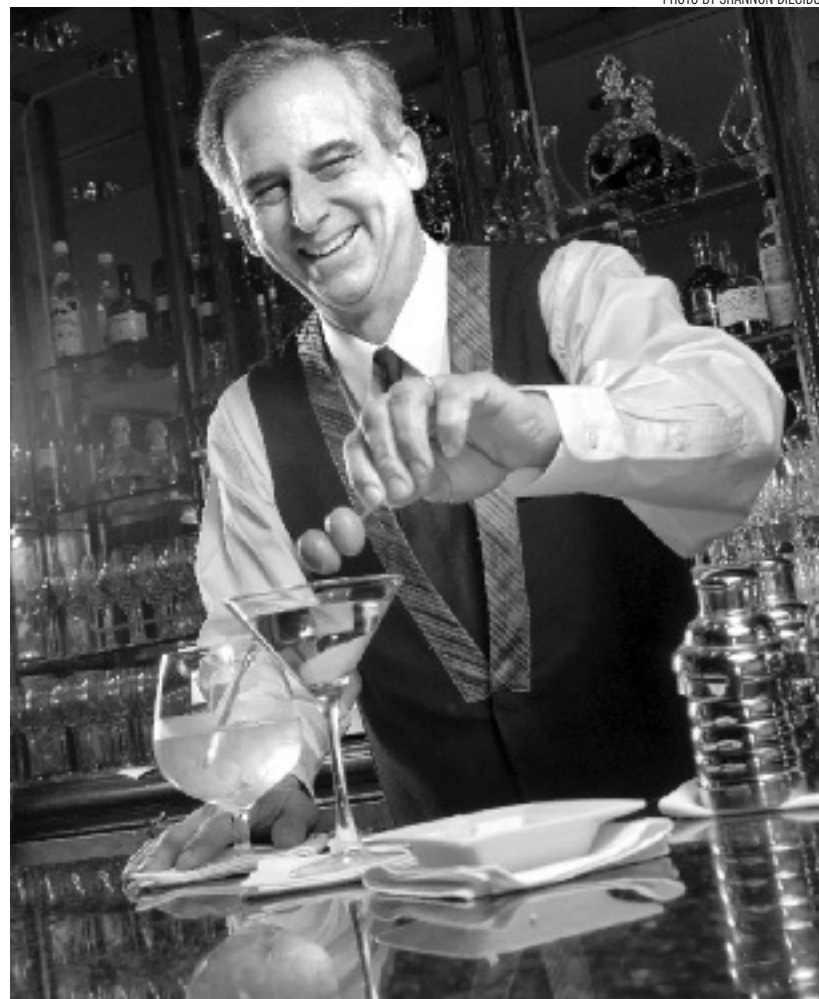
That discretion comes into play with some of the notable guests who stop at the Polo Club for a drink. Blais recounted when Rudy Giuliani received a round of applause from patrons when he walked in not long after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. There was also the time Paul McCartney came in for a drink the Saturday night before the 2002 Super Bowl.

But Blais said it's the regular customers who motivate him.

"A number of people say the reason they come here is because of me. It really makes you feel good and appreciated. I've established a nice clientele here, and that is what keeps me going," he said.

In the community, Blais picks up food once a week from Whole Foods and distributes it to homeless shelters throughout town. He was also on the Wall of Fame at the former blood center on Tulane Avenue for donating before Hurricane Katrina flooded the facility. •

— Craig Guillot



BEST *Bartenders*

STAR HODGSON

Loa

Age: 32

Family: husband, David; sons, Cypress, 3, Drake, 3 months

Years at establishment: three

Star Hodgson moved from her native San Francisco to New Orleans with her husband, David, in 2004, lured by the promise of more affordable housing and a city that “celebrated art, music, food and beverages.”

Hodgson has thoroughly embraced her adopted home and reveled in its cocktail culture. However, the specialty drinks she has come to be known for at Loa, the bar in the International House Hotel where she has worked for the past three years, in many ways reflect her roots.

“Growing up in northern California, I was exposed to so many things that shaped the way I see cocktails,” Hodgson said. “I grew up eating healthy foods before the Slow Foods movement had a name. The exceptional growing season kept the local markets filled with fresh produce, and there was always something seasonal to play with.”

In New Orleans, Hodgson finds inspiration in the seasonal fruits and vegetables grown

locally. Some of her favorite original concoctions include drinks such as Springs Promise, a vodka-based drink with Ponchatoula strawberries, lemon and cucumber, and the Princess and the Pig, made with bourbon infused bacon and mixed with Ruston peaches and champagne.

“It keeps creating new cocktails inventive and fun when you work within what is in your backyard,” she said.

Occasionally, though, she will turn to non-native items such as kiwi, pomegranate and grapes to supplement locally grown ingredients.

Hodgson has spent half her life working in the beverage business, having started as a bar back and working her way up the bartending food chain. And although her resume includes a degree in child development and significant teaching experience, Hodgson said she returned to bartending for the flexibility it afforded her, allowing her more time to be a mom.

“I wanted to raise my own children,” she said. Bartending allows her to watch her children during the day while keeping her “socially active and liquidly creative.” •

— *Emilie Bahr*



PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMI

BEST *Bartenders*

CHRIS MCMILLIAN

Bar UnCommon

Age: 48

Family: wife, Laura; children, Patrick, 28, Lauren, 26, Rachel, 23, Samuel, 20, Rebecca, 17, Sally, 15

Years at establishment: two

For Chris McMillian of Bar UnCommon, bartending is not just a job. It's a performance, an art, a labor of love.

When making his trademark mint julep, he regales customers with the history of the drink as he creates the classic southern cocktail.

“I perform my poetry with the julep,” McMillian said.

In retrospect, a bartending career seems like it was preordained for McMillian, a fourth-generation Louisiana bartender. His great grandfather ran a saloon at the turn of the 20th century and his uncles ran clubs.

But it was partially fate that put him on this path.

McMillian had a landscaping business when he was in his 20s. His truck broke down one day, shutting down his business, and with a pregnant wife, he was desperate for any work. His wife, Laura, who worked at the Royal Sonesta, helped him get a job as a bartender for the hotel's catering outfit.

McMillian threw himself into his new job,

asked questions and proved to be a quick learner. He focused on the basics first.

“I started with classic drinks because they stood the test of time,” McMillian said. “You don't have to reinvent the wheel if you can do those well.”

Like any good bartender, McMillian relishes the opportunity to meet new people and make those people happy.

“To be in the hospitality industry, there's only one qualification: you have to get pleasure from pleasing people,” McMillian said. “When you see that look on their face, that tells you it (the drink) is better than what they've ever had before.”

McMillian's love of people comes through when he talks about his most memorable customers. He has served celebrities such as pro football's Troy Aikman, actress Uma Thurman and performer Bette Midler, but he is just as delighted and honored to have served America's longest serving active duty Marine. The excitement over meeting and serving all types of people is what makes the bartending profession rewarding for him.

“You meet people from every walk of life, and you have to be able to relate to all of them,” McMillian said. •

— *Fritz Esker*



PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMI

COMMANDER'S PALACE

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Executive chef: Tory McPhail
Year opened: 1880
Cuisine: haute Creole
Price range: entrées run between \$26 and \$42

It's a pretty safe bet that diners at Commander's Palace during Mardi Gras wear paper crowns and wave napkins for an impromptu second line through the dining room.

"Going out to eat should be fun, not an intimidating experience," said Stephen Woodruff, manager of Commander's Palace. "When you give yourself permission to play, it's easy to have a good time."

Beyond the classic Southern hospitality displayed at their Washington Avenue culinary institution, the Brennan family is also active in promoting tourism in New Orleans.

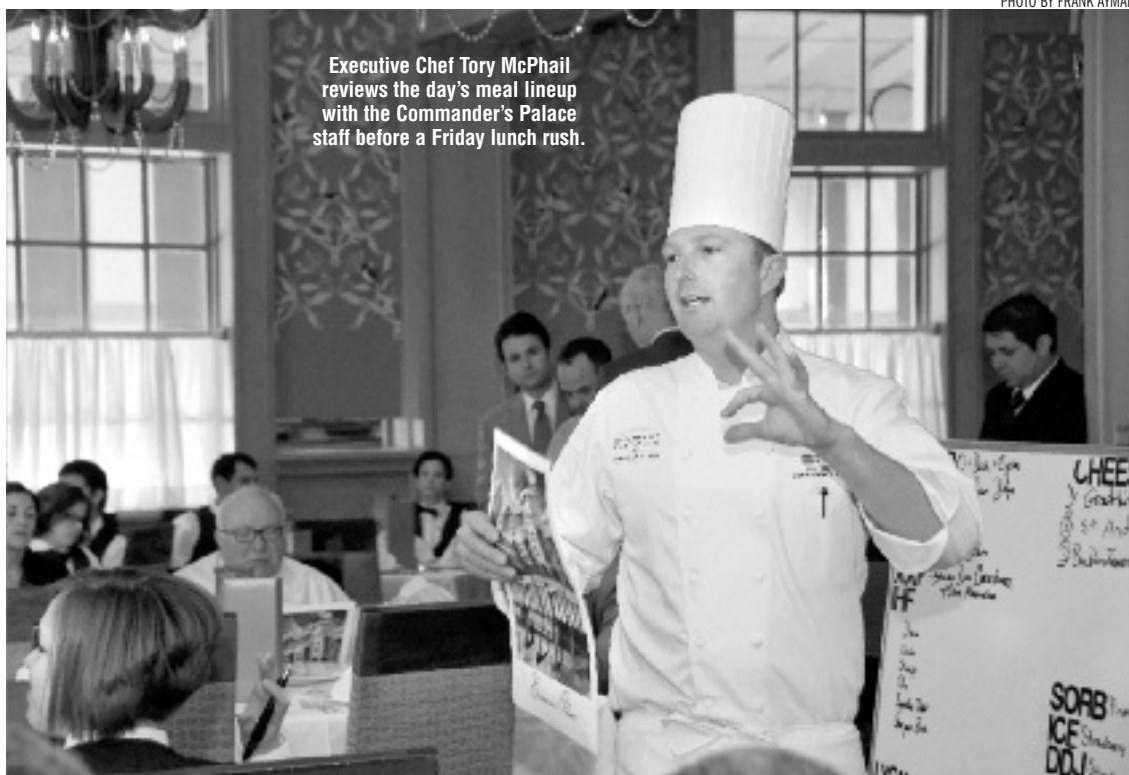
"One of the most important things is to get more flights in (to the city)," Woodruff said.

Toward that end, Ti Martin, an owner of Commander's Palace with Ella, Dottie and Lally Brennan, sits on the board of the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport.

"We can improve the image of New Orleans by providing tourists with a quality experience from the moment they land," said Woodruff, who promotes the city to leisure travelers as president of the National Restaurant Association's local chapter.

Commander's Palace also raises money for Girls First, providing opportunities to underprivileged girls, and supports ProStart, a program that helps teens who want to enter the hospitality industry. This summer, Commander's Palace will work with a dozen interns from the program.

"The chef, party planner and dining room captains will work with these students," Woodruff said. "These are all efforts to move the community forward."



Executive Chef Tory McPhail reviews the day's meal lineup with the Commander's Palace staff before a Friday lunch rush.

Commander's Palace also works closely with local farmers and fishermen. Executive Chef Tory McPhail and his team visit the docks, make contacts and get products directly from suppliers, Woodruff said.

"About the only thing in our freezer is ice cream," he said.

Though the legendary restaurant is known for its bread pudding soufflé and turtle soup, two-thirds of its menu changes every day.

Any early morning in the Commander's Palace courtyard, you'll see a dozen cooks, the sous chef and chef gathered. They'll talk about what dishes they want to try and how it'll look on the plate.

"Our menu is created in the moment, not in a test kitchen," Woodruff said. •

— Anne Berry

The **New** home for

Thin-Fried Catfish

New Orleans
SINCE 1984
HAMBURGER & SEAFOOD CO.

www.nohsc.com

WWW.CAIRESUPPLY.COM

CAIRE

HOTEL & RESTAURANT
SUPPLY INC

Taking CAIRE of Hospitality
Congratulations to the 2010 CityBusiness Culinary Connoisseurs!

VISIT OUR SHOWROOM OPEN TO THE PUBLIC - Mon-Fri 8-5 • Sat 9-1
Call 504.482.0294

Commercial Kitchen Utensils • Pots • Pans • China • Flatware
Glassware • Wood Banquet Tables • Heavy Equipment
All products commercially tested.

With this coupon, receive 10% off in stock items only (excludes negotiated items.)

Congratulations
2010 CULINARY CONNOISSEUR WINNERS

from

K-PAUL'S
LOUISIANA
KITCHEN

CHEF PAUL PRUDHOMME'S
MAGIC
Seasoning Blends™

Taste the Passion!

RESERVATIONS
(504) 596-2530
WWW.KPAULS.COM

"Life's Too Short for Dull Food!"™

TOLL FREE
(800) 457-2857
WWW.CHEFPAUL.COM

THE GRILL ROOM AT WINDSOR COURT HOTEL

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Executive chef: Drew Dzejak
Year opened: 1984
Cuisine: American, contemporary, eclectic
Average price: \$40

The Grill Room at Windsor Court Hotel was created while the area was being redeveloped for the 1984 World's Fair. In the following years, it became known for innovative menus, impeccable service and unique atmosphere.

During the early 2000s, management and ownership changes caused The Grill Room to lose its coveted five-star status, and the operation was scaled down even further after Hurricane Katrina.

"The restaurant had struggled for awhile," sommelier Sara Kavanaugh said. "Our general manager David Teich has tried hard to create a strong, supportive foundation. We are currently a four-star restaurant. It takes a big commitment to reach five stars."

A typical day for Kavanaugh includes meeting with the kitchen staff to discuss the menu, interviewing prospective employees, speaking with the morning and night managers and going over wine selections, of which there are 50 wines for less than \$50.

Executive Chef Drew Dzejak came to New Orleans in November and, like Kavanaugh, said he believes the restaurant is now stable.

"For a long time, the restaurant had a revolving door of chefs and general managers," said Dzejak, who has revamped the menu to feature a unique dining concept of four culinary categories — unadulterated, steakhouse, indulg and Southern.



Patrick Craven and Megan Uram have lunch at The Grill Room at Windsor Court Hotel.

Dzejak came to New Orleans after working in Charleston, S.C., as chef de cuisine in the Charleston Place Hotel's Palmetto Café and Thoroughbred Club.

"The physicalness of the dining area at The Grill Room gives it an atmosphere that is lacking everywhere else," Dzejak said. "You can have an intimate dinner and actually talk to each other.

The porch has floor-to-ceiling windows where you can look out onto the courtyard."

The Grill Room offers a buffet lunch during the week, and a champagne jazz brunch on Sundays, as well as daily breakfast and dinner, and brunch on Saturdays. •

— Lisa Bacques

STELLA

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Executive chef: Scott Boswell
Year opened: 2001
Cuisine: global-modern dishes influenced by world flavors and Boswell's Lake Charles roots
Price range: entrees run between \$32 and \$49

Located on Chartres Street, Stella has a luxurious, international ambiance, reflecting the vision of owner and chef Scott Boswell, who trained in New York, France, Italy and Tokyo.

Boswell never thought he would achieve his current success with Stella, where the cuisine is mostly European, with strong Asian influences and Creole touches. Offerings include black and white truffles and caviar, along with Louisiana oysters and andouille sausage. Another popular entree is Duck Five Ways, saluting China and Japan.

Stella is known for its modern progressive cuisine, which includes an international caviar menu, including three different wild Iranian caviars and multiple truffles all night long.

"We had cash flow problems for a long time after Katrina. But in the past year, everything's come together," Boswell said.

Earnings from Stanley, his newer, Jackson Square eatery, sustained him through Stella's lengthy renovation, a project that began a week before Katrina.

"Considering where we were in 2005, I couldn't have imagined things would be as good as they are now."

Boswell wishes each day were longer as he dreams up new



Scott Boswell, chef and owner of Stella restaurant, chats with Rachel Hinton, left, and wife, Tanya Boswell.

dishes and plans visits to other cities to learn from chefs there.

"Cooking and creating drives my soul," he said. "On my days off, without distractions, you'll find me home in the kitchen cooking for my wife and me."

Being an owner is a natural progression from Boswell's work in the 1990s under chefs at the Grill Room in the Windsor Court

Hotel and in European restaurants. Since 2001, he has run the entire show.

"Being your own boss has challenges — financial ones, along with responsibilities to staff and customers. But I like the fact that it also has no limitations." •

— Susan Buchanan

CULINARY CONNOISSEURS CELEBRATION

The 2010 Culinary Connoisseurs cocktail reception on April 20 at the New Orleans Museum of Art honored 50 culinary professionals for their business and community achievements. Medallions were presented to the honorees upon arriving and New Orleans CityBusiness Publisher Mark Singletary recognized each honoree later in the evening. These photos and more can be seen on the CityBusiness Facebook page.

Photos by Frank Aymami



Maurice French Pastries chef Jean-Luc Albin and Ralph's on the Park Executive Chef Chip Flanagan.



Morty Valdejuli, left, and Le Meritage Executive Chef Michael Farrell.



Eric and Stephanie Pope, Aunt Sally's Praline Shop CEO Frank Simoncioni and his wife, Charlotte.



From left: Sandra Lindquist, Trey Yuen chef Tommy Wong, Lacey Toledano and Justin Meith.



Stella owner Scott Boswell and Rachel Hinton.



From left: Grill Room at Windsor Court Hotel honorees Shun Li, Sara Kavanaugh and Drew Dzejak.



From left: Eliza Moritz-Akers, Dawns Akers and Café Giovanni Sous Chef Brad Akers.



Kimberly Patton-Bragg mixes drinks during the Culinary Connoisseurs celebration.



Kelly Hutley and her husband, La Parvenu chef/owner Dennis Hutley, with their dog, Sugah Bee.



Stella owner Scott Boswell, left, and Le Meritage Executive Chef Michael Farrell.



Andrea's owner Andrea Apuzzo, left, with Brigtsen's owners Marna and Frank Brigsten.



Palace Café sous chef Ben Thibodeaux with wife, Audrey.



From left: Mercedes representatives Carl Keith, Ellis Weiss, Harry Anderson, Christopher Stuben and Leo Flotron.



Ralph's on the Park Executive Chef Chip Flanagan, left, and owner Ralph Brennan.



Henrietta and Randy Guste, former manager of Antoine's.



From left: Eileen Nix, Sandra Kruse, Cat Kennedy, Jay Nix, John Kennedy, Frank Brigtsen and Justin Kennedy.



Bartenders Star Hodgson of Loa and Marvin Allen of the Carousel Bar.



Aunt Sally's Praline Shop CEO Frank Simoncioni, left, and Karl Schmidt.



Nanak Rai, Adolpho and Gloria Garcia and Rio Mar's Nick Bazan with Haydee and Dr. Hernan Bazan.

CAFÉ ADELAIDE

Executive chef: Chris Lusk
Year opened: 2004
Cuisine: Creole with a twist
Price range: between \$16 and \$25
2009 sales: about \$2 million

Located in the Loews New Orleans Hotel near the Warehouse District, Café Adelaide was named in honor of the late Adelaide Brennan, the fun-loving aunt of owners Ti Martin, Lally Brennan and Alex Brennan-Martin.

Inspired by her personality, the restaurant aims to create a lively and laid-back dining experience for its patrons, said general manager Robert Wailes.

"We like to call ourselves Commander's Palace's fun little sister," said Wailes, referring to the flagship of the restaurant family's enterprises. "We want customers to be loud and boisterous."

Wailes characterizes the restaurant's cuisine as Creole embellished with an eclectic mix of other culinary influences from around the world. But local ingredients are the stars of the recipes.

One of Café Adelaide's most popular appetizers is its shrimp and tasso "corndogs," a play on the ballpark favorite that substitutes the shellfish for the usual wiener and comes with a five-pepper jelly, pickled okra, chicory greens and Crystal Hot Sauce butter.

Another appetizer offering an unusual twist on two Creole classics is the Camellia Red Bean-crusted oysters. The salt and pepper shrimp and grits, flavored with rosemary and a white barbecue sauce, is one of the most requested entrees, Wailes said.

The restaurant's Swizzle Stick Bar is known for its handcrafted cocktails, and Wailes recently upgraded the wine menu for diners with an eye toward generating some buzz in that area, too. His efforts paid off in a 2009 Award for Excellence from Wine Spectator Magazine.



Café Adelaide server Geo Gandy pours soup for regular customers Nancy Connolly, left, and Nina Kirk.

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Café Adelaide reaches out to the local community through its support of nonprofits such as Dress for Success and Girls First, which sponsors trips for underprivileged girls to summer camp.

Wailes said the restaurant owes much its success to a brisk lunch business from downtown workers, and lately it has enjoyed a healthy expansion of its breakfast crowd, drawing hotel guests

and locals such as Drew Brees.

Wailes said the restaurant and the hotel have continued to thrive despite the recession.

"We kept hearing that we should be expecting a drop-off in business, but so far it hasn't happened," he said. •

— Sonya Stinson

DOMENICA

Executive chef: Alon Shaya
Year opened: 2009
Cuisine: regional Italian
Price range: between \$10 and \$20 for lunch; between \$18 and \$40 for dinner

Kerry Kelly was working at Lüke, a John Besh establishment, when she learned of Besh's plans to open an Italian restaurant at the newly renovated Roosevelt Hotel.

She casually told him she used to run the top Italian restaurant in the San Francisco area and soon found herself managing Domenica, Besh's newest venture.

"I guess I kind of asked for it," Kelly said. "I love natural. It's all so natural."

Kelly said she sees a passion in the preparation of Domenica's regional Italian cuisine that begs people to sit down and indulge as though it's a Sunday family dinner.

"We're a very loving group here," she said, describing an atmosphere that makes customers feel at home.

Part of that passion lies in executive chef's Alon Shaya's talent in taking Italian dishes and giving them a regional twist, using fresh, seasonal ingredients.

"I hope to keep the passion alive," Kelly said. "Everyone who leaves here leaves generally on a good note. I just have to strive to keep that."

Domenica's opening team — Kelly, Shaya and sous chefs Todd Pulsinelli and Giuseppe Caratozzolo — spent a month in Italy embracing the cuisine and culture.

"It incorporated more passion," Kelly said of the experience.



PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

"I think we already had passion for what we do. The experience was incredible."

Incredible is the same word she uses to describe Shaya's strac-ci, one of Domenica's signature dishes, which features Shaya's house-made pasta, oxtail ragu and fried chicken livers.

There's also the octopus carpaccio salad, which features thinly sliced octopus with fennel over citrus. Domenica's house-made pastas, cured meats and custom-brewed beers set the venue apart from others.

While Domenica opened only last year, the restaurant enjoys the community outreaches Besh already initiated.

At least one of its workers, Kelly said, is a former student of Café Reconcile, the restaurant training program for at-risk youth which the Besh Restaurant Group supports.

Other Besh outreach efforts include supporting the Edible School Yard, which teaches organic gardening and seasonal cooking at two area charter schools. •

— Diana Chandler

LA CREPE NANOU

PHOTO BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAFFER

Executive chef: Son Phan
Year opened: 1983
Cuisine: French
Price range: between \$12 and \$25, including wine
2009 sales: \$1.8 million

La Crepe Nanou has been serving traditional French cuisine in New Orleans since 1983. Serving specialties such as Les Moules Marinières (mussels), Crêpe Bourguignonne (crepe with beef tips) and L'Escalope de Veau (veal with tomato sauce), the menu is pretty much straight from France.

With French-born Nanou DeRaczynski at the helm and authentic décor, diners often say they feel as if they're stepping straight into a French bistro.

"We wanted to make a French-style restaurant but wanted to make it in a manner that was affordable. My first idea was 'eat French for the price of a cheeseburger,'" DeRaczynski said.

The menu started with crepes because they were affordable. But as La Crepe Nanou built its customer base, it also expanded its menu. That

model has proven to be a recipe for success, and DeRaczynski said he manages reasonable prices by offering a diverse menu that changes depending on the ingredients he can obtain.

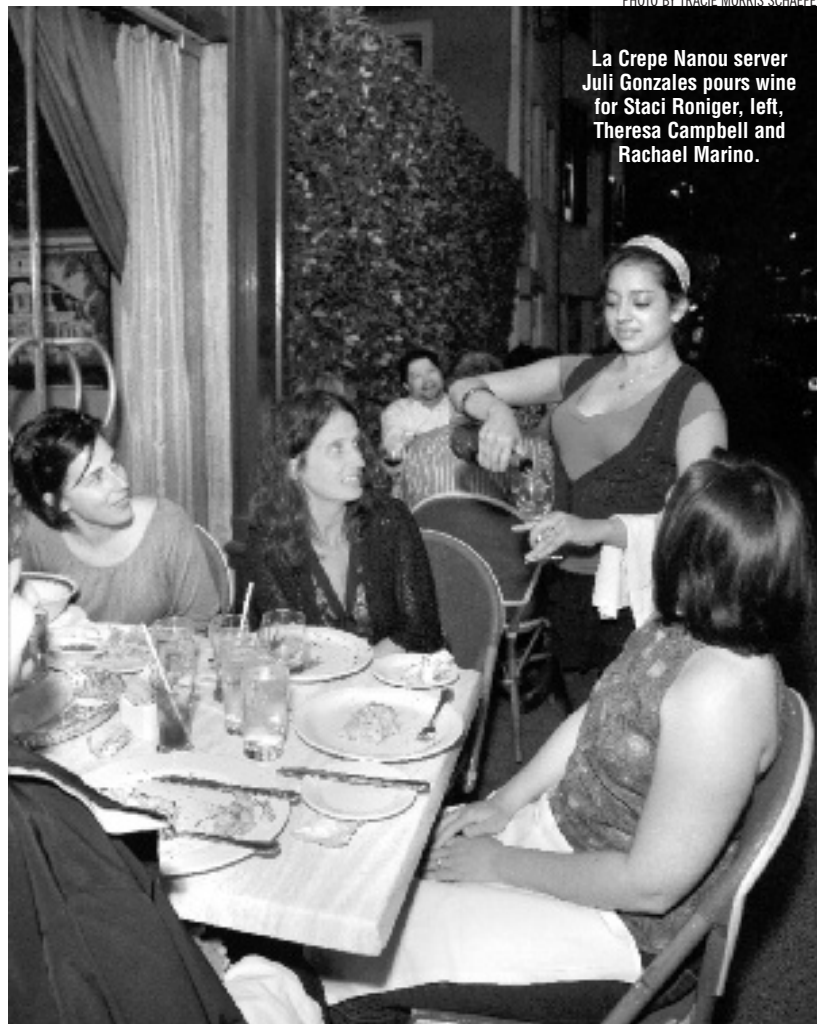
From the cook who bakes the bread to the fishermen who provide the day's fresh catch, DeRaczynski stresses combining the best ingredients for the perfect dish. All of that is passed on to the diner who can have traditional French cuisine at a reasonable cost, he said.

Offerings change on a regular basis, but mussels are extremely popular with diners. DeRaczynski said La Crepe Nanou goes through about 60 pounds per week.

La Crepe Nanou is only open for dinner but has developed a strong following and reputation. DeRaczynski has worked with some of the same cooks for more than 26 years and takes great pride in the team atmosphere he has developed.

"I just like the challenge of it," DeRaczynski said. "In this business, you make a dish, put it on the table and there aren't many second opportunities. We make sure that every day is our best."

— Craig Guillot



La Crepe Nanou server Juli Gonzales pours wine for Staci Roniger, left, Theresa Campbell and Rachael Marino.

LE PARVENU

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMANI

Executive chef: Dennis Hutley
Year opened: 1996
Cuisine: innovative American Creole
Price range: \$15 for lunch; between \$25 and \$30 for dinner
2009 sales: about \$500,000 gross

About 15 minutes outside of the blended dining scene that is New Orleans, Le Parvenu stands out, wrapped inside of a cottage-style home surrounded by a white picket fence on a genteel piece of land in Kenner.

Established in 1996 by owner and chef Dennis Hutley, Le Parvenu brings in 400 to 600 customers each week and has amassed consistent recognition for its unique cuisine.

"We're a fine-dining restaurant in a casual atmosphere," said Lisa Firmin, operations manager and banquet coordinator.

A prudent amount of attention to staff and customers is an important ingredient of its success, she said.

"Just keeping a watchful eye on the staff and making sure everyone is taken care of without hovering over them," she said.

Le Parvenu has a close-knit crew of about 15 staff members, and Hutley said he's proud

of the camaraderie, noting that a good staff produces good service and consistency.

The end result, he said, is "happy customers," 80 percent of whom are regulars.

In addition to lunch, brunch and dinner, Le Parvenu's distinct atmosphere provides a casual fine dining experience for tea parties, showers, rehearsal dinners and other events.

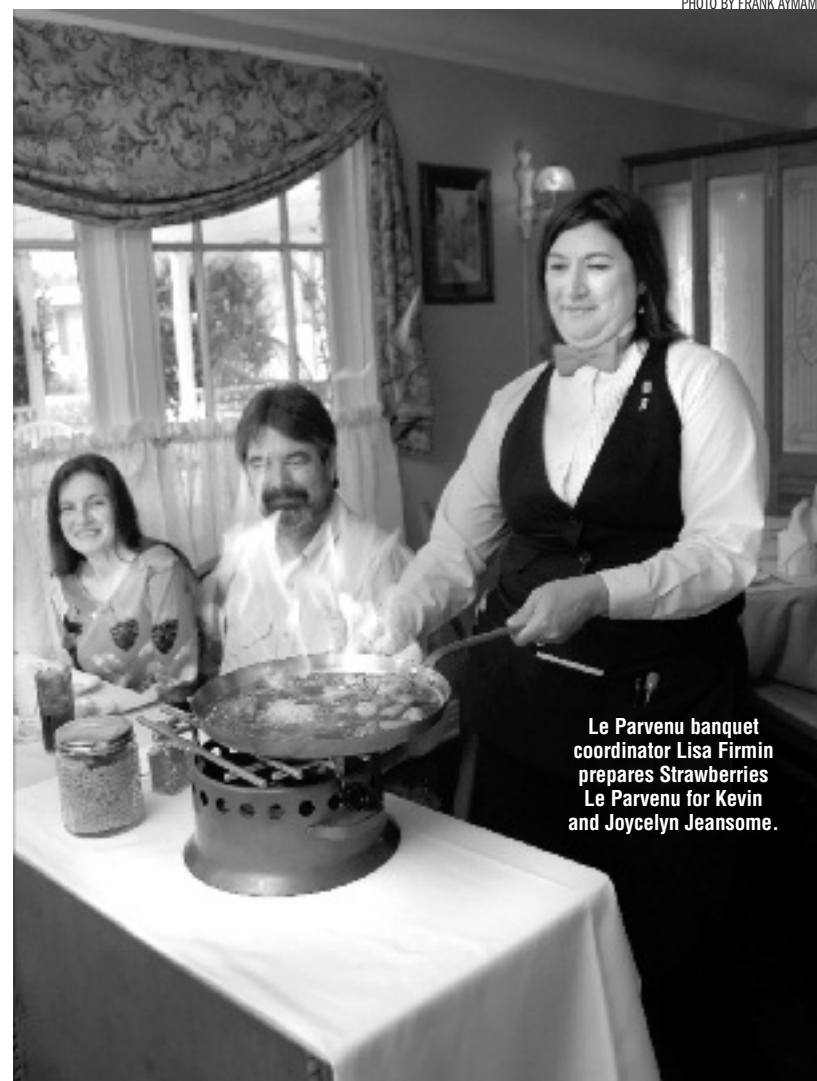
While the restaurant's aesthetics are unique, the cuisine is the ultimate bait that helps reel in customers.

Among the house favorites at Le Parvenu is the paneed lobster tail, served with a cognac and cream sauce and layered with shrimp and crabmeat.

"Most of the stuff that we serve here, you can't get anywhere else," Hutley said.

Le Parvenu has received the DiRoNA Award of Excellence every year since 2003, which is presented by Distinguished Restaurants of North America, a nonprofit that promotes dining institutions that meet its standards of excellence in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Le Parvenu is one of 11 Louisiana restaurants to achieve such recognition.

— Nayita Wilson



Le Parvenu banquet coordinator Lisa Firmin prepares Strawberries Le Parvenu for Kevin and Joycelyn Jeansome.

Executive chef: Adolfo Garcia
Year opened: 2000
Cuisine: Spanish and Central American, seafood
Price range: entrees run between \$17 and \$21

When Rio Mar opened in the Warehouse District in 2000, the neighborhood's star was on the rise but its current level of vibrancy had not yet been realized.

There were a few hotels around and several high-end condominium developments completed or under way, Rio Mar co-founder Nick Bazan recalled. Restaurant offerings were slim, with Emeril's being a notable exception.

In many ways, the area "was for the taking," Bazan said.

Given the state of the neighborhood at the time, not to mention the prospect of opening a new restaurant in a city known for its abundance of top-notch eateries, Bazan and his business partner, chef Adolfo Garcia, knew their plans to open a Latin-themed seafood restaurant in a relatively obscure section of town represented a risk.

Still, it was one they felt fairly confident in taking because of the type of fare they planned to serve.

"Besides us and Lola," a Spanish restaurant on Esplanade Avenue near Bayou St. John, "there was nobody else doing this kind of cuisine," Bazan said.

The model ultimately chosen for Rio Mar seemed a no-brainer for Bazan, who hails from Argentina and fled with his family in the late 1970s to New Orleans when the ruling military junta was targeting perceived subversives such as Bazan's father, a university professor.

Garcia grew up in Metairie, but his family is Panamanian and he spent significant time in Panama in his youth. Before joining forces with Bazan, Garcia had operated a Latin restaurant called Criollo in



Scott Keys, left, and Nanak Rai have lunch at Rio Mar.

the French Quarter.

Despite the heavy Spanish historical influence on New Orleans, Bazan said, most of the city's culinary offerings were focused on the French Creole style of cooking.

"People wanted something more global," Bazan said. "I think they were ready for something else than the French Creole."

Apparently, they were.

Today, Rio Mar attracts a loyal, largely local following that

Bazan said is especially fond of the restaurant's reliance on a Mediterranean style of cooking that is heavy on vegetables and olive oil.

Rio Mar has also garnered ebullient praise and honors from critics and magazines based in New Orleans and beyond. In February, Garcia was named a semifinalist for this year's James Beard Foundation Chef Award in the Best Chef: South category. •

— *Emilie Bahr*

Executive chefs: James, Tommy and Frank Wong
Year opened: 1980
Cuisine: Chinese
Price range: between \$6 and \$9 for lunch; between \$10 and \$20 for dinner

James, Frank, John, Tommy and Joe Wong sailed from Hong Kong to Texas in 1967 with their widowed mother.

For a time, the brothers worked at their grandfather's restaurant but scattered after his death. By 1971, they reunited in Louisiana and opened a restaurant in a former fast food hut.

By adapting traditional Chinese recipes to south Louisiana tastes, the brothers built a following. In 1980, they opened Trey Yuen in Mandeville, followed by a second location in Hammond in 1986. The 250-seat restaurant is a replica of a Chinese palace, surrounded by Asian gardens and waterfalls.

"We were one of the first to sell alligator," said Noel Wong, daughter of Tommy Wong and now the manager at Trey Yuen in Mandeville.

Trey Yuen offers dishes made with locally farm-raised alligator, which Tommy Wong calls "bayou veal," tossing the reptile's tender tail meat with fresh mushrooms and almonds or serving it sliced with shredded vegetables in a soy-based sauce.

Another Cajun-inspired dish is crawfish set in a spicy black bean lobster sauce that Noel calls "Chinese etouffée."

Over the years, Trey Yuen, which means "crystal jade garden," developed a signature sauce so popular that they bottle and sell it — a sweet, fiery Tong Cho sauce that is used as a glaze for meat and fish.

Trey Yuen has fed heads of state and even catered a crawfish in



Trey Yuen server Kristin Hernandez delivers lunch to Gerrie Barker, left, and Susan Fredrichs.

lobster sauce dinner at the White House for President Bill Clinton.

The restaurant also serves the local community by hosting school field trips and putting on a Chinese New Year celebration for students that includes costumes, lunch, dragons, stories and music.

The North Shore establishment also donates dishes to the New Orleans Chefs' Charity for Children, which benefits St. Michael's Special School. And every December, Trey Yuen hosts members of

the U.S. Marines Reserves after their Toys for Tots drive.

When it celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, three members of Trey Yuen's wait staff will have been with the restaurant the whole time.

"We're truly a big family," Noel Wong said. "My father and uncles, they put their heart and soul into this restaurant." •

— *Anne Berry*

UPPERLINE

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAM

Executive chef: Ken Smith
Year opened: 1983
Cuisine: classic Creole
Price range: \$40

Upperline has been a fixture in the Uptown area since 1983, when JoAnn Clevenger's enthusiasm convinced her husband to put a second mortgage on their house so she could make her dream a reality.

"My son, Jason, was our first chef," Clevenger said. "We had 40 chairs and no money for payroll the first week. Fortunately, in the beginning there was a honeymoon. Everyone wants to see what's new."

"What makes us unique is a combination of food, service, art and wine. The art really gives us an added dimension. It reflects the spirit of Louisiana and New Orleans."

Executive Chef Ken Smith, who has worked for Clevenger for 19 years, agrees.

"We have good service and great ambiance, and our artwork from Louisiana artists sets us apart," he said.

Smith and Clevenger share a mutual interest in collecting rare and out-of-print cookbooks, and met through a woman selling books online.

"Ken has a passion for learning about the history of food," Clevenger said. "He's very conscientious, always creating and cooking. He enjoys making the guests happy."

Upperline specializes in Creole cuisine, and the idea of combining fried green tomatoes with shrimp remoulade was invented



Heather Jones and Dennis Schnyder share cocktails before dinner at Upperline.

there. Another event unique to Upperline is its Garlic Festival, held every summer.

"It's a team effort," she said. "It's great when guests tell us how much they loved the food or that we made their celebration special. It's a winning circle of passion, creativity and practicality. There are

always new people coming in the door. It's about bringing joy and creating memories."

Upperline also was a semifinalist this year for the James Beard Foundation Award in the category of Outstanding Service. •

— Lisa Bacques

VIZARD'S

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAM

Executive chef: Kevin Vizard
Year opened: 2006
Cuisine: Creole-Mediterranean
Price range: entrees run between \$20 and \$34
2009 sales: \$800,000

At the Magazine Street establishment bearing his name, chef and owner Kevin Vizard serves inventive Mediterranean-Creole fare after he and his wife, Cammie, transplanted the restaurant from St. Charles Avenue two years ago.

Vizard puts his own touches on classic French, Italian and Spanish dishes, which he notes are the major influences in Creole cooking. Born and raised in New Orleans, his sorcery with seasonings and sauces for shrimp, oysters, Gulf fish, rib-eye steak and roast chicken keeps the eatery's 50-seat dining room hopping on weekends.

Uptowners, along with tourists exploring Magazine Street, collect in the vine-covered building to try imaginative variations on local staples.

One favorite is Crabmeat Nelson — fried eggplant wrapped around jumbo, lump crab with cremini mushrooms and Bearnaise sauce. Another is a desert called Black and Blue, a dark chocolate cake filled with a blue-cheese cake and topped with a port-wine reduction and Chantilly cream.

Vizard said he feels fortunate to have found his current site, formerly home to Alberta Restaurant, after the Garden District Hotel



Krystall Snemyr, left, and Brittany Daniel enjoy dinner at Vizard's.

where Vizard's was formerly located struggled and eventually closed.

"Our biggest challenge now is to stay focused and make money with a small place," he said.

Vizard, who had worked at Commander's Palace, Mr. B's Bistro and Cafe Adelaide, has owned a handful of restaurants. Economic downturns are tough for restaurateurs since people tighten belts and

eat at home more, he said.

"After Katrina, no one wanted a dinner reservation after 8 p.m., and it has pretty much stayed that way," he said.

Vizard and his crew often lend their time at events and fundraisers that involve local chefs, including the Creole Tomato Festival. •

— Susan Buchanan

FIVE HAPPINESS

PHOTO BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAEFER

Executive chef: Tan Pham
Year opened: 1979
Cuisine: Chinese
Price range: \$10 to \$15

At Five Happiness, the signature dishes on the menu reflect the traditional cuisine of China's Hunan and Sichuan provinces.

Rose Lo, who co-owns and manages the restaurant with business partner Peggy Lee, said the food's robust flavors and peppery accents suit local palates well.

"We think that is very similar to what New Orleanians like, with all of the Cajun spices," Lo said.

Lee started the business in 1979, while Lo came aboard in 1988. She said running the restaurant means "hard labor and long hours." She arrives each day about 9 a.m. and begins overseeing preparations for the 11 a.m. lunch opening.

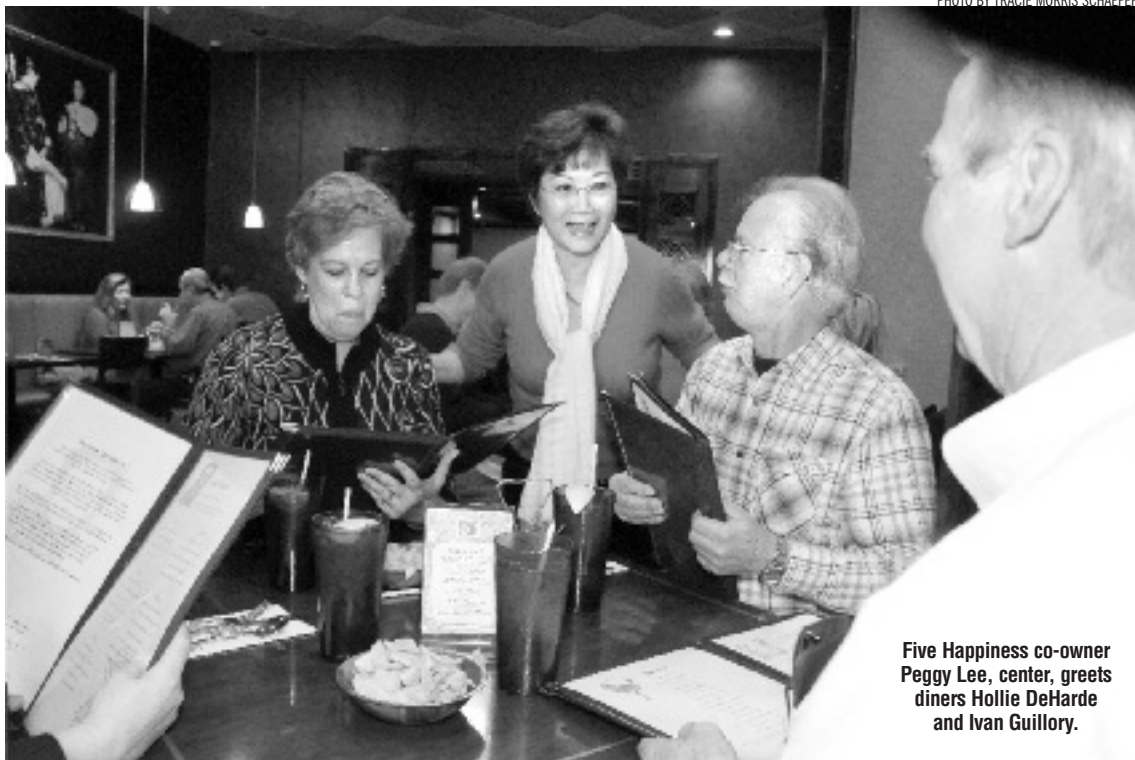
Back-of-house activities include everything from receiving shipments from suppliers to setting up the kitchen.

"Chinese food requires a lot of prep, from chopping fresh vegetables to marinating (ingredients)," Lo said. "Everything is from scratch, including the sauces."

She adds that the restaurant also makes a point of using local and regional ingredients, such as Gulf shrimp and Louisiana pecans that go into its top seller, shrimp and honey-roasted pecans.

Five Happiness has undergone three expansions, as well as a complete renovation after Hurricane Katrina. Several years ago, the business acquired a neighboring restaurant, turning the space into its Imperial Room for private events accommodating up to 200 people.

Carnival is always a busy time for the restaurant's 80-person staff,



Five Happiness co-owner Peggy Lee, center, greets diners Hollie DeHarde and Ivan Guillory.

which extends its hours to accommodate the after-parade crowd.

Five Happiness supports a host of community causes, including Jefferson Dollars for Scholars, Zoo-to-Do, Habitat for Humanity, Ochsner Health System, Children's Hospital and the Asian Pacific American Society.

Because it's a family-style restaurant, Lo said many of its customers are parents of school-age children, so education has

always been a big focus for giving back.

"When they have something going on at school or they want us to help out with their fundraising, we always respond to those requests," she said. "We help out from kindergarten to the college level." •

— Sonya Stinson

JOEY K'S

PHOTO BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAEFER

Executive chef: Dexter Johnson
Year opened: 1989
Cuisine: Creole and New Orleans food
Price range: \$8.95 to \$17

In a neighborhood defined by a variety of shops and heavy pedestrian traffic, Joey K's Restaurant and Bar has endured good and bad economic times thanks in large part to its local clientele.

"We have so many people who come to the restaurant every day," said Cindy Farnet, who owns the Magazine Street eatery with her husband, Sam Farnet. "And that has really gotten us through any hard times. It's great that we also have a lot of tourists, but it's the locals and neighborhood people that we rely on."

That equation changed somewhat in February 2009 when the producers of the Food Network program "Diners, Drive-ins and Dives" filmed a segment highlighting the restaurant.

"People from all over the country have been coming in because of that show," Farnet said. "It gave us a big boost to the point where we did not feel the effects of the economy last year."

The program also underlined what locals have known for a while about Joey K's — it's a comfortable establishment with a large menu that includes po-boys, catfish, jambalaya and red beans and rice.

"All the local staples," Farnet said, "as well as our dishes like Shrimp Magazine and Trout Tchoupitoulas."

The Farnets purchased the restaurant in 1989 when it went by another name and was one of the few thriving businesses in an area that seemed to be in decline.

But a mid-1990s Magazine Street retail revival, coupled with a more recent surge in renovations in the adjacent Irish Channel, have turned the fortunes of the stretch around.



Joey K's server Angelea Fultz drops off lunch to Ralph Capitelli, left, Steve London and Luke Hyatt.

Joey K's has contributed to that rebirth, expanding its property in the process. The restaurant boasts a backroom as well as outside dining space. In addition, the Farnets converted what was once residential space on the second floor into room for private parties.

Even with its diverse client base, Joey K's remains a neighborhood restaurant.

"We have never lost sight of that particular customer," Farnet said. "They're the reason we're here." •

— Garry Boulard

NEW ORLEANS HAMBURGER AND SEAFOOD CO.

PHOTO BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAEFER

Top executive: Paul McGoey, owner and managing partner
Year opened: 1985
Cuisine: New Orleans-style hamburgers and seafood with Louisiana flair
Price range: between \$6.95 and \$14.95

Founded in 1985, New Orleans Hamburger & Seafood has grown to be a popular eatery in the area by serving authentic New Orleans cuisine quickly for people on a budget. From its first location in Elmwood, the company has added five locations throughout south Louisiana.

While the restaurant has always had a fair following, it went through a number of changes in 2000, including remodeling the dining areas and expanding the menu to more than 10 types of hamburgers and specialties such as the Stuff-a-Letta and the BBQ Shrimp One-Handed Po-boy.

The salad bar was replaced with a wider selection of salads, while new creations such as the thin-fried catfish and Shrimpzilla have received rave reviews from diners. The menu changes even included using exceptionally large shrimp on po-boys, something managing partner Paul McGoey said few restaurants do.

"The whole concept has just matured," McGoey said. "The biggest comment I hear when people walk in the door is how much it has changed. Better quality, better selection and better service."

Aside from its food, the restaurant's concept is different in that patrons order at the counter, seat themselves and wait for the food to be brought to the table. McGoey calls the concept "fast casual" and said it allows for a full restaurant experience in half the time because diners aren't always waiting on servers to take orders.

That often means patrons can have an authentic New Orleans meal at the restaurant with a full-service experience and be in and out in 25 minutes, he said.

"The service is really no different other than we just don't take



New Orleans Hamburger and Seafood's executive team includes Scott Langford, Chris Audler, Paul McGoey and Don Noel.

your order at the table. Since it's fast casual, guests only leave about \$3 to \$5 per table instead of the 15 percent to 20 percent, so it's less expensive," McGoey said.

In today's economy where people are not always on-the-go but trying to save money, some New Orleans Hamburger & Seafood locations are packed almost nightly. Some locations have a drive-through.

"It's just the right balance and combination of New Orleans food done in a fast and casual format," McGoey said.

The neighborhood establishment also gives back in the form of Kickin' Back, which brings youth soccer clinics to inner-city New Orleans. •

— Craig Guillot

PARKWAY BAKERY AND TAVERN

PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMAMI

Executive chef: Jay Nix, owner; Justin Kennedy, chef
Year opened: 2003
Cuisine: po-boys
Price range: between \$2 and \$13.55
2009 sales: \$2.25 million

At the corner of Hagan and Toulouse streets, Jay Nix, owner of Parkway Bakery and Tavern, and his family are in the sandwich-making business. Don't expect the selection to change anytime soon.

"We just want to be a po-boy shop. That's all we want to be," Nix said.

Pick any day of the week, and the scents of roast beef, ketchup, fried seafood and a variety of po-boy concoctions and side items permeate the air at Parkway Bakery and Tavern. About a dozen employees line the kitchen and, like clockwork, push out 500 to 1,000 overstuffed po-boys each day.

Nix is the third owner of Parkway, which he purchased in 1994. He opened the establishment in 2003 and struggled with operations and finances until Hurricane Katrina. After that, Nix was \$1.5 million in debt and had just bought new kitchen equipment, all of which had been improperly installed.

To worsen matters, the 8 feet of water that rose inside the establishment temporarily halted operations. But the chance to recover was Parkway's lifeline, allowing Nix to bring in family members to help run the business, manage finances and get out of debt. He also purchased new equipment and had it properly installed.

Sisters Eileen, Nancy and Dale Nix and partner, Sandra Kruse, help with administration and finances, while nephews Justin and Johnny Kennedy manage the kitchen. His niece, Catherine Kennedy, runs the tavern.

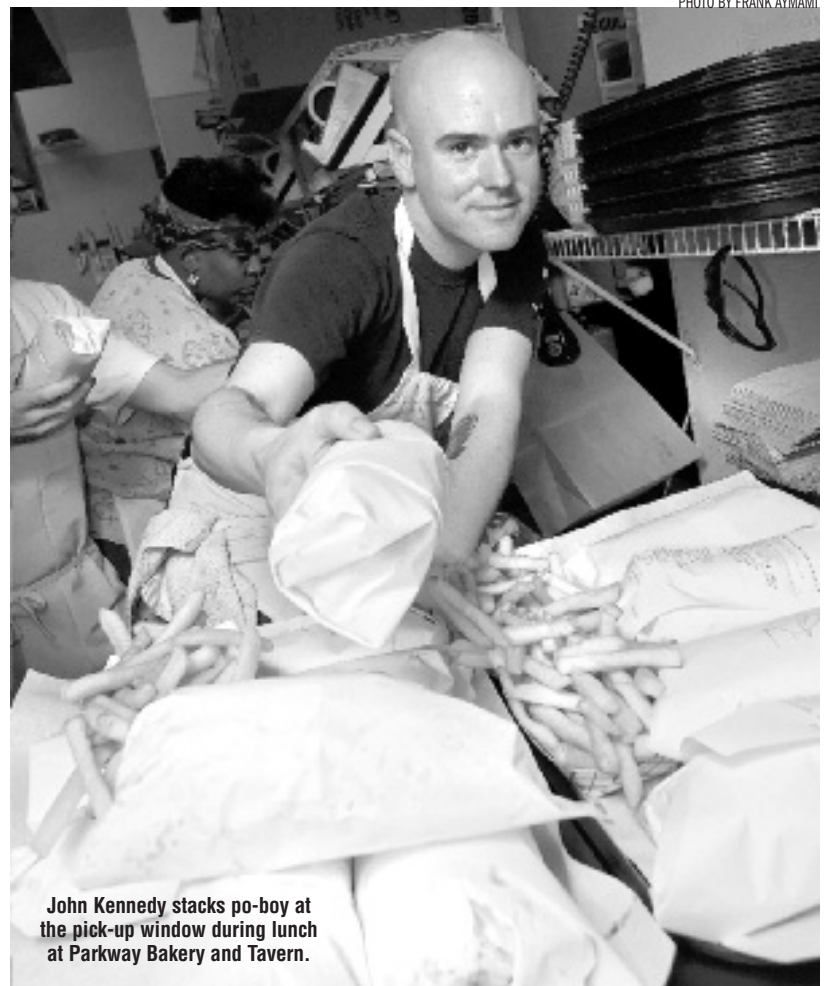
Nix said Parkway is experiencing a steady surge of success that wouldn't have materialized without their help and expertise.

Today, Parkway's business has quadrupled, the restaurant's staff has increased from 10 to 30 and roast beef remains the best seller.

"We're doing really well," Nix said. "Before Katrina, it was like: 'What have I done?' I'd dug a hole so deep in debt that no amount of situations could have ever pulled me out of that pit."

Last year, Parkway earned about \$2.25 million in sales, and, Nix said, 2010 sales have already surpassed that benchmark. •

— Nayita Wilson



John Kennedy stacks po-boy at the pick-up window during lunch at Parkway Bakery and Tavern.

PIZZA MAN

PHOTO BY SHANNON DIECIUJE

Executive chef: Dustin Schrems
Year opened: 1976
Cuisine: pizza and salads
Price range: about \$15 for a large pizza
2009 sales: \$391,000

For almost 35 years, Paul Schrems has been delighting diners young and old with a meal and a show as the Pizza Man of Covington.

"We do more than just sit folks down and serve them pizza," Schrems said. "They get to see the entire cooking process, from flipping the dough to assembling the ingredients. Kids and adults get a real kick out of it."

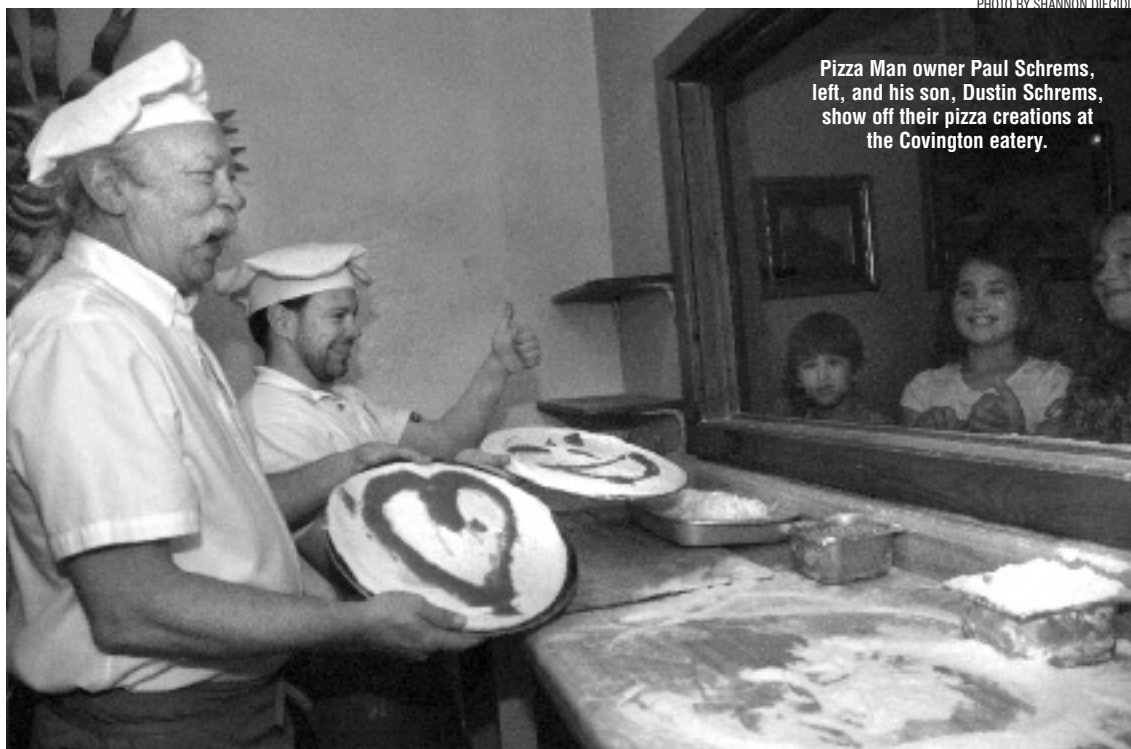
Schrems said most of his recipes, which use an olive oil base rather than traditional red sauce, were handed down to his wife, Evelyn, whose father, Bob Schoen, ran a similar pizza restaurant in Houma.

"Some of these recipes go back 50 years," Schrems said. "We honor his memory with a pizza called 'The Board,' which is a nod to the way his restaurant presented a list of pizza toppings on a flat wooden board. The pie includes fresh spinach, mushrooms, capicola ham, feta and mozzarella cheese, onions and garlic."

In addition to a large picture window between the seating area and the kitchen, Pizza Man also offers other simple amenities to keep patrons entertained.

"The walls are lined with pizza boxes decorated by local artist Suzanne King," Schrems said. "The decorations change based on the current holiday or season. There is also an old style jukebox that offers two songs for 25 cents."

Schrems said most of the songs on the jukebox are big band and folk tunes, with some classic rock mixed in. With all the



Pizza Man owner Paul Schrems, left, and his son, Dustin Schrems, show off their pizza creations at the Covington eatery.

songs available, however, he said there is one in particular that gets the most action.

"I think we've all heard 'Puff the Magic Dragon' by Peter, Paul and Mary about a million times," Schrems said. "Nearly every kid who walks into the restaurant selects that song."

Schrems said his biggest accomplishment has been staying in

business as long as he has with a restaurant full of loyal employees who have work alongside him.

"There's one family that I have worked with for more than 20 years," Schrems said. "It is a family friendly atmosphere that appeals to all ages." •

— Robin Shannon

R&O'S

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Executive chefs: Carla Flick, Roland Mollere II, U.J. Mollere and Sherrill Mollere (it's a family affair)
Year opened: 1980
Cuisine: Italian, seafood
Price range: appetizers run between \$3 and \$15; entrees run between \$11 and \$25

Not much has changed since Roland and Ora Mollere opened their eatery 30 years and two buildings ago.

And they like it that way. Drove of loyal customers do, too.

Diners visit R&O's Pizza Restaurant wearing their work uniforms — anything from jeans and camouflage baseball caps to suits and ties. They descend on the two-story red building in Bucktown to feast on plates piled high with seafood fried to a honey brown tint, Italian dinners and soft shell crab Parmesan sandwiches. Then there's the award winning meatball sandwich.

Amanda Mollere, 26, is the front of the house manager and her sister, Gretchen Mollere, are both 10-year employees.

"Recently, my aunt started sharing recipes

with me," Gretchen said. "That is an honor."

Everything is homemade, even the hot bread pudding with rum sauce.

Carpenters by trade, Roland Mollere Sr., and his son, U.J., built the current building from the ground up in 1990. Little has been altered since then.

R&O's is a family joint and just about every Mollere has worked there since it opened in 1980. Roland and his wife had two boys and two girls, and they had children. Seven of those 10 grandchildren are now employed at R&O's. Pictures of family and friends from Bucktown bowling and fishing leagues hang on the walls.

The sisters are third-generation restaurateurs, steeped in revered traditions of the business. And along with other family members, they hope to take over one day — with a few changes, of course.

Gretchen wants to add corn and crab soup to the menu and Amanda would make the décor more modern. But she realizes one thing.

"This is R&O's. It's been like this for 20 years." •

— L. Kasimu Harris



From left: Pascagoula, Miss., tourists Jordyn Walet, Nic Manuel and Lydia Manuel share a pizza at R&O's.

SURREY'S CAFÉ AND JUICE BAR

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Executive chef: Adrian Schrauwen

Year opened: 2001

Cuisine: breakfast and lunch specialties, organic juices, fresh local seafood

Price range: less than \$20

Surrey's Café and Juice Bar features organic juices, generally featuring a fruit or vegetable in season, and its specialty, wheatgrass shots. The business also tries to support local vendors as much as possible and is cultivating a garden in Mid-City to have a constant food supply.

"I make compost from the peels and pulp leftover from the juices we make," said owner Greg Surrey.

An appearance in the movie "Failure to Launch" was a boon for the cafe.

"It really put us on the map," Surrey said. "The movie industry found us, and we get a lot of takeout orders from crews filming on location here."

Surrey's was also featured on The Food Network's "Diners, Drive-ins and Dives."

"That guy really knows how to find places," Surrey said of the show's host, Guy Fieri. "I can't say it was a big boost, but we are still getting people who saw the show and made plans to come here."

Executive chef Adrian Schrauwen grew up in Holland and learned skills gathered while traveling around the world.

"In Switzerland, Belgium, and France, I learned that each region has its own flavors and techniques," he said. "I enjoy bringing my creativity and experience from the other places I've been to the people I work with."

What makes Surrey's unique, Schrauwen said, is the atmosphere, and a broad variety of breakfast items.



Surrey's server Gretchen Greenbride, center, drops off lunch to Sara Romano, left, and David Cater.

But Surrey's is one of the many New Orleans eateries that has a cash-only policy.

"Credit cards are evil," Surrey said. "If we had a credit card machine, we would have to pay the credit card company."

The cafe, located at 1418 Magazine St. in the lower Garden

District, started in 2001 as a small neighborhood cafe in a narrow, converted house.

"Since we have conditional zoning, we can't do anything (to expand)," Surrey said. •

— Lisa Bacques

Congratulations

FRANK BRIGTSEN

for being chosen as a
2010 CityBusiness Culinary Connoisseur!

Brightsen's

723 Dante St.
New Orleans, LA
504.861.7610

**Charlie's
Seafood**

8311 Jefferson Hwy
Harahan, LA
504.737.3700

www.brigtsens.com

Congratulations
Chef Chip Flanagan

EXECUTIVE CHEF
CULINARY CONNOISSEUR 2010

Ralph's
On the Park

900 City Park Ave. • 488-1000 • Free Valet Parking
Friday Lunch | Sunday Brunch | Dinner 7 Nights | Private Parties

Andrea's

ITALIAN SEAFOOD
RESTAURANT
& CATERING
Quality & Tradition

MAKE HER FEEL LIKE SHE'S
the most important person in the world

THIS MOTHER'S DAY
MAY 9TH

Celebrate with friends & family & enjoy a delicious
FOUR COURSE MEAL
11AM - 8PM RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED

504.834.8583

3100 19TH STREET • METAIRIE [NORTH CAUSEWAY AT RIDGELAKE]
OPEN 7 DAYS • LUNCH, DINNER, & SUNDAY CHAMPAGNE BRUNCH
www.andreasrestaurant.com

Upperline Restaurant

2010 CityBusiness Culinary Connoisseurs

A huge thank you to our fantastic staff,
wonderful guests and terrific vendors,
without whom none of this would be
possible.

— Jo Ann Clevenger

1413 Upperline St., New Orleans
www.upperline.com • 504.891.9822

BEST
Manufacturers

ABITA BREWING CO.

PHOTO BY SHANNON DIECIDUE

Top executive: David Blossman, president
Year opened: 1986
2009 sales: \$20 million in net sales

Abita Brewing Co. President David Blossman said his best marketing tool is to invite his customers to Abita Springs to see how the company manufactures its beer and then provide a taste of the finished product.

For close to 25 years, that sample has gone down smooth.

The North Shore-based beer brewing company produced 90,000 barrels of beer last year, a 13 percent increase in volume, and saw net sales reach \$20 million.

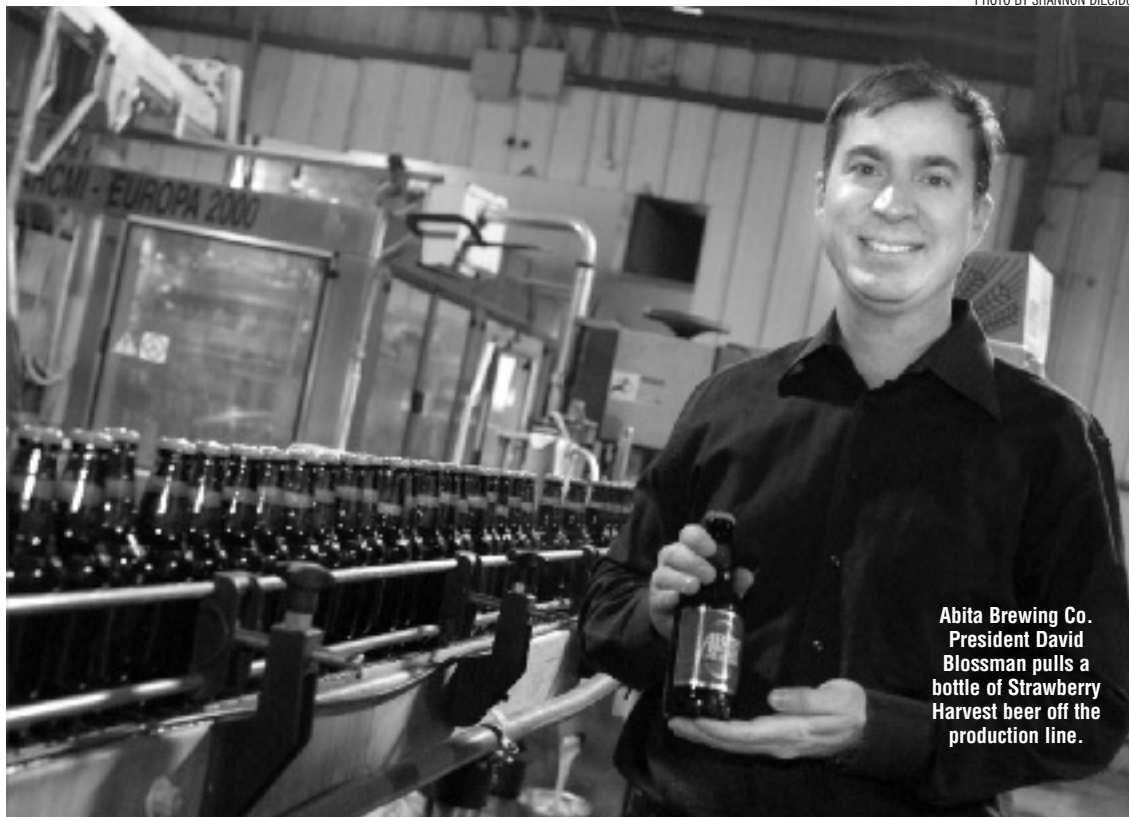
Abita has grown into the 28th largest commercial brewer by production volume in the nation and the 15th largest craft brewer in the United States.

Their tour-friendly plant, which takes customers through the entire brewing manufacturing process and ends in the tasting room, welcomed 15,000 visitors last year.

"We started the visiting tours in 1986, and in 2008 we added a visitors center and tour office," Blossman said. "It's one of our things we're most proud of, to be personable with our customers and community, show people what we are all about, how we make our product and then let them taste it themselves."

In its first year of brewing in 1986, the brewery produced 1,500 barrels of beer. Eight years later in 1994, the company outgrew its original site in Abita Springs — now a 100-seat brew pub — and moved up the road to a larger facility to keep up with demand.

Abita's list of beers ranges from the most popular product Abita Amber to Purple Haze and Turbodog, while seasonal beers include Mardi Gras Bock, Red Ale, Wheat Beer, Fall Fest and Christmas Ale. They also have three in their Harvest series: Strawberry Harvest, Satsuma Wheat and Pecan Harvest.



Abita Brewing Co. President David Blossman pulls a bottle of Strawberry Harvest beer off the production line.

In the community, Abita produced Restoration Pale Ale following Hurricane Katrina, which raised about \$550,000 from sales for hurricane relief. Abita also donated \$30,000 to St. Joseph Abbey last year from sales of its Abbey Ale, sending 25 cents to the monastic retreat center for every bottle sold.

"It honors the ancient tradition of monks who perfected the art of brewing beer," Blossman said. "We are always looking at ways to give back to the community because for close to 25 years, our community has opened its arms to us." •

— Tommy Santora

BEST
Manufacturers

AUNT SALLY'S PRALINES

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Top executive: Frank Simoncioni, CEO
Year opened: about 1935
Top product: original Creole praline
2009 sales: about \$3 million

Last October, a trio of new sweet treats from Aunt Sally's Praline Shop won high honors at one of the confectionery industry's biggest events.

The company was one of the top finalists in the non-chocolate category at the National Confectionery Sales Association's inaugural New Product Awards, presented in conjunction with the annual Candy Hall of Fame Awards in Tampa, Fla.

The winning candies included Aunt Sally's Lite, a low-sugar, low-calorie praline made with Swerve, an all-natural sweetener developed by a Mandeville company, and the Sugar and Spice praline, made with a touch of Tabasco.

With its third entry, the Caramel Pecan Chewy praline, Aunt Sally's joined a popular trend among candymakers outside the state and created what is, so far, the best seller of the new additions.

"We produced that product because so many other candy companies, like in Texas and Oklahoma, make a product that they call a praline but is more like a caramel loaded with nuts," said Frank Simoncioni, CEO of Aunt Sally's Pralines. "We had to have something like that, but we needed to have an original recipe."

The company recently sent a shipment of 2,000 pralines to children in Haitian hospitals and others affected by that country's earthquake. It also supported the local Special Olympics last fall.

When Simoncioni arrived at Aunt Sally's in May 2005, the company was on the verge of implementing a major national marketing campaign. Then came Hurricane Katrina, and Simoncioni had to concentrate on helping his employees cope with the aftermath.



From left: Aunt Sally's employees Viola Smothers, Naomi Jackson, Althea Massey, Janet Smith and Harriet Field sample the company's signature pralines with CEO Frank Simoncioni.

Today, Aunt Sally's has a renewed focus on becoming a national brand. One strategy has been to increase the shelf life of some of its products to boost its wholesale business. Another push has been to move Aunt Sally's beyond pralines, something the company was forced to do when its post-Katrina customer base shrank along with the city's tourism business.

"(Katrina) allowed me to realize that Aunt Sally's relied too much on only one item, so we were able to come up with a lot of private-label products," Simoncioni said. "We do a lot of gourmet products besides pralines that are made for us to Aunt Sally's specifications, like muffaletta mixes, jellies and marinades." •

— Sonya Stinson

BEST
Manufacturers

BAUMER FOODS

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Top executive: Al Baumer Jr., president and CEO
Year opened: 1923
Top product: Crystal Hot Sauce

Baumer Foods Inc. remains an enduring Louisiana tradition as it enters its ninth decade, having survived the Great Depression, half a dozen smaller recessions and a hurricane that forced the company to relocate its manufacturing operations from New Orleans to Reserve.

"We are a family-held corporation, and there is a certain amount of personal pride that my mother and father had and my wife and I continue to have in the business," said Alvin Baumer Jr., president and CEO of the company that was launched in a two-story brick building on Tchoupitoulas Street by his parents, Alvin and Mildred Baumer.

"It's a pride of product, but also a pride in the company itself, the employees, and all of that," he said.

Known for its Crystal Hot Sauce, Baumer Foods has in many ways given shape to the international demand for hot spicy condiments, expanding a product line that today includes Crystal Extra Hot Hot Sauce; a variety of specialty sauces, including teriyaki, soy, steak and Worcestershire sauces; and barbecue and chicken wing sauces.

Along the way, the company's staff grew to

more than 220 with annual sales in excess of \$54 million by 2004.

Hurricane Katrina pushed 8 feet of water into Baumer's Tulane Avenue plant and mangled the 1940s neon Baumer Foods sign, showing a chef stirring a pot of strawberry jam, next to the Pontchartrain Expressway.

"The plant was totally destroyed, making it impossible for us to remain there and still put out our product," Baumer said.

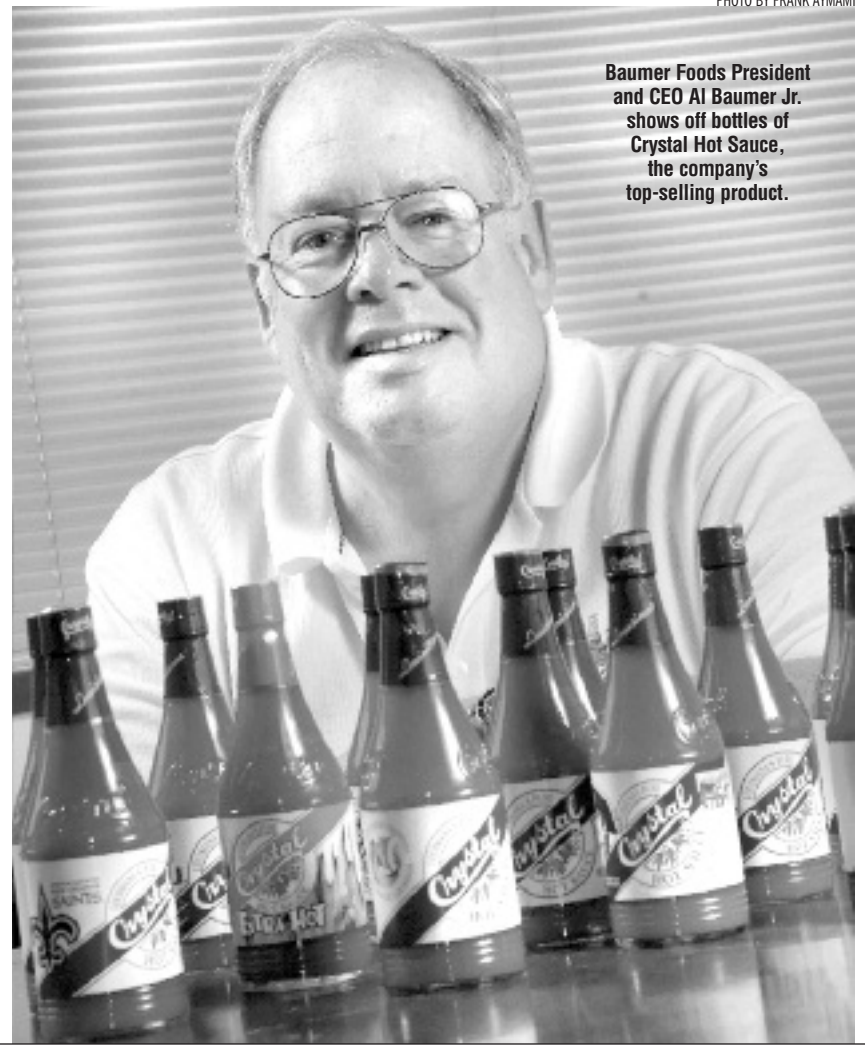
But the company rebounded, initially issuing its product from out-of-state bottling plants before signing a 15-year lease with the Port of South Louisiana to use a 190,000-square-foot facility.

Today, the company has a staff of about 150 people, Baumer said. And after an initial drop-off, Baumer Foods has seen its annual sales return to pre-Katrina levels.

Even the much-loved Baumer Foods sign has returned. Earlier this year The Domain Cos., which built The Preserve apartment complex on the site of the former Baumer processing plant, unveiled a recreated version of the neon image.

Baumer Foods also has supported the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation and sponsored the University of New Orleans Privateers as well as the Cajun Zydeco Stage at the French Quarter Festival. •

— Garry Boulard



Baumer Foods President and CEO Al Baumer Jr. shows off bottles of Crystal Hot Sauce, the company's top-selling product.

BEST
Manufacturers

HUBIG'S PIES

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Top executive: Otto Ramsey and Lamar Bowman, owners
Year opened: trademarked in 1915, Faubourg Marigny facility opened in 1922
Top product: apple and lemon pies

Although it was founded in 1915 in Fort Worth, Texas, Hubig's Pies has grown to become a staple in New Orleans. The company had expanded to more than a half-dozen cities in its early years. But when the Great Depression hit, all of the operations failed except for its Faubourg Marigny location.

Today, Hubig's Pies still makes its product at the Dauphine Street facility it has called home since 1922. The company offers a variety of flavors, with selections such as sweet potato and blueberry available when the local produce is in season. Mainstays also include apple, lemon, pineapple, peach, cherry and banana.

The handheld pies are sold at more than 3,000 locations throughout southeast Louisiana.

While Hubig's is a household name in the area and its pies can be found at just about every corner store, its operations have changed very little over the decades.

"We're just a bakery that makes fresh pies. We use only the freshest ingredients and have

been using the same cutout that we've always had," said operations manager Andrew Ramsey.

Hubig's makes about 20,000 to 30,000 pies per day depending on the time of the year.

Ramsey said Hubig's takes great pride in using only fresh and local ingredients and has denied requests from grocers seeking frozen, shrink-wrapped pies. With a shelf life of only a week, Hubig's Pies are known for their freshness.

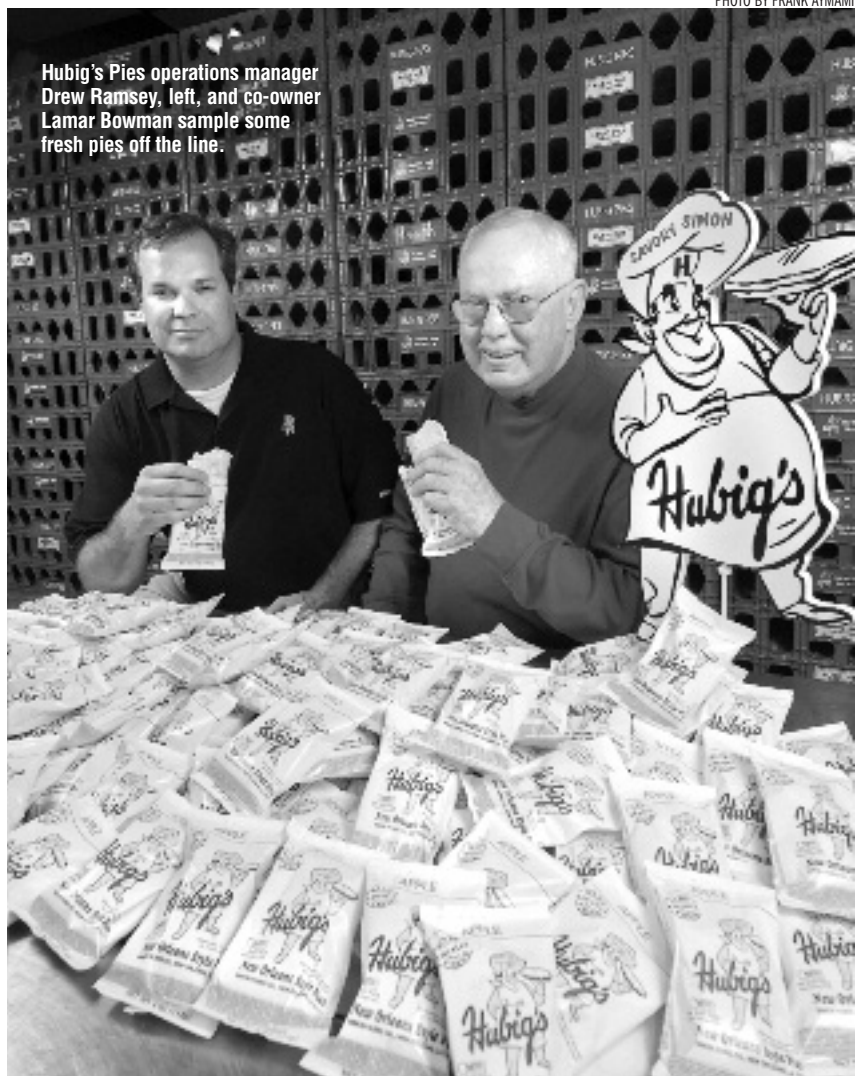
"We've been approached by grocers who want pallets of frozen pies. We politely have to deny such requests. We'll only sell them fresh, and the pies need tender loving care," Ramsey said.

Hubig's has about 35 employees who do most of the work by hand. The warehouse has a few large machines, but pies are still put into the cooker and wrapped by hand, and delivered fresh by Hubig's trucks.

A few years ago, the company started selling their pies online, and Ramsey said it has been a hit with those looking for a fresh taste of New Orleans.

Hubig's also donates pies to Boy Scout groups, St. Joseph altars, Bridge House, Ozanam Inn and other nonprofits. •

— Craig Guillot



Hubig's Pies operations manager Drew Ramsey, left, and co-owner Lamar Bowman sample some fresh pies off the line.

BEST
Manufacturers

MAGIC SEASONING BLENDS

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Top executives: Chef Paul Prudhomme, owner; Shawn McBride, president and CEO

Year opened: 1983

Top products: Blackened Redfish Magic; Meat Magic; Magic Salt Free Seasoning; Barbecue Magic

For world renowned chef and businessman Paul Prudhomme, what started out as a simmering desire to help at-home cooks add more flavor and excitement to their meals has boiled over into a buzzing enterprise with international appeal and promise.

Each year, millions of pounds of herbs and spices are blended into unique seasonings at Prudhomme's Magic Seasoning Blends manufacturing plant in Harahan for distribution throughout the United States and 27 countries.

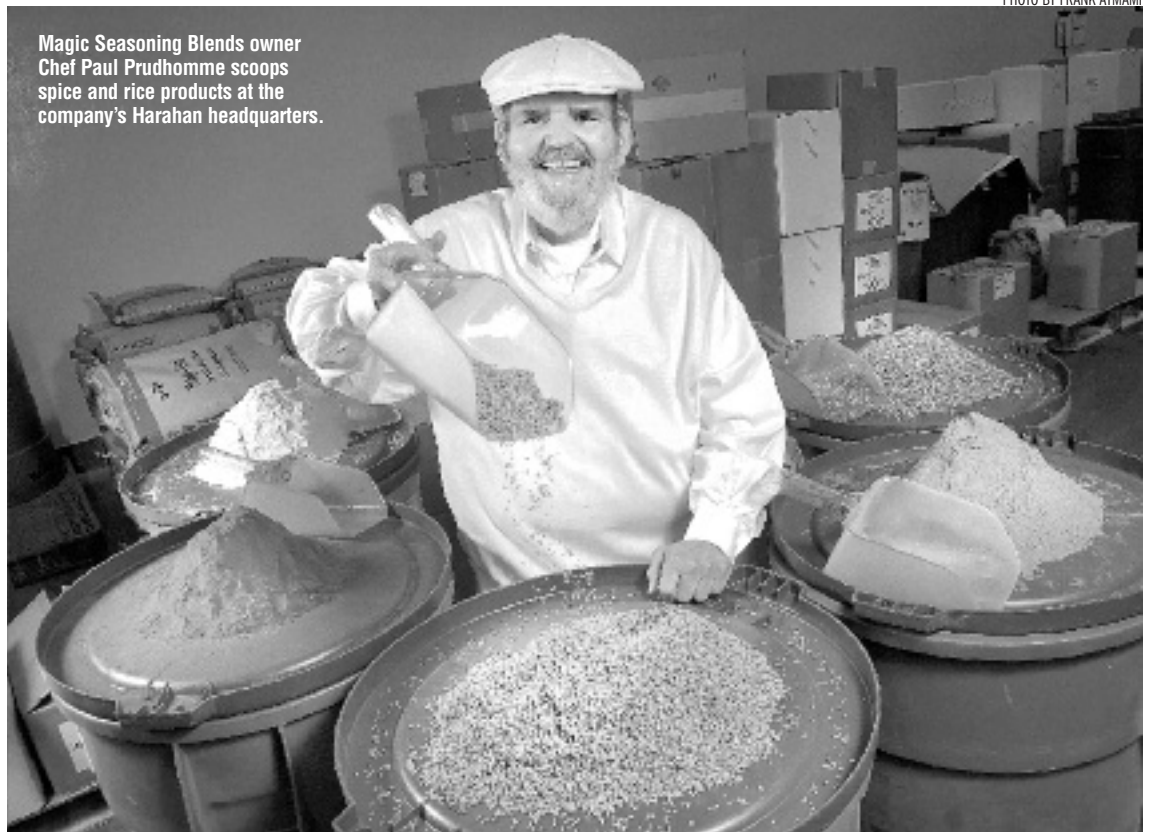
Prudhomme said the business is growing daily, and he credits product distinction and reliability for the company's ongoing growth and success.

"It's delivering consistency and the best herbs and spices you can imagine," he said.

To maintain such quality, Magic Seasoning Blends trains its staff to adhere to and understand Prudhomme's standards, President and CEO Shawn McBride said.

The manufacturing process is "culinary driven because of Chef Paul," McBride said.

McBride said Magic Seasoning Blends is making its own mark on Louisiana's food culture. The same can be said for the company's success, as Prudhomme regularly involves Magic Seasoning Blends in worldwide service initiatives, giving priority attention to the local community. The company and Prudhomme's K-Paul's Louisiana Kitchen served about 45,000 meals after



Magic Seasoning Blends owner Chef Paul Prudhomme scoops spice and rice products at the company's Harahan headquarters.

Hurricane Katrina.

"We believe that if a company is successful, it should return back to the community," Prudhomme said.

Magic Seasoning Blends employs about 95 people. An additional

15 employees work at Chef Paul's Smoked Meats plant outside Opelousas that produces andouille sausage and tasso using Prudhomme's family recipes. •

— *Nayita Wilson*

BEST
Owners

PAUL, SCOTT AND STEVEN BALLARD

WOW Café & Wingery

PHOTO BY SHANNON DIECIDUE

Year opened: 2001

Years at establishment: nine

2009 sales: \$28 million

When brothers Paul, Scott and Steven Ballard opened the World of Wings Café & Wingery in Covington in November 2001, the New Orleans area had very few options when it came to Buffalo-style chicken wings.

"We had no competition," said Steven, WOW co-president. "Our suppliers always told us that we put wings on the map in New Orleans. No other restaurant was making them like we were."

The chain, which now has more than 50 locations in 20 states after franchising started in 2002, began as a dream cooked up by Paul, who aspired to create a casual dining restaurant that could appeal to families and professionals.

"I was on a trip in Dallas to a football game at (Southern Methodist University) in 2000 when we stopped into a restaurant serving wings," Paul said. "I thought it was something that could really take off back home. I assembled a team, including my brothers, and we grew from there."

Scott said one of the keys to the restaurant's increasing success is the variety in cuisine as well as sauces.

"We have a test kitchen in Abita where we spent time playing around with various flavors," Scott said. "With the help of chefs George Rhode and Paul Prudhomme, we came up with about 20 different sauces to go with the wings. That variety makes all of the difference. We also don't just do wings. We have salads, wraps, burgers and tenders so that there is something for everyone."

"I think one of our crowning achievements is the impending opening of a WOW location in Coney Island, N.Y., in June of this year," Scott said. "We are opening right next to the iconic Nathan's



From left: WOW Café and Wingery co-owners Scott, Steve and Paul Ballard display some of the chain's signature sauces.

Famous Hot Dogs location."

All three brothers have deep roots and involvement in the community. Scott is active with St. Tammany Parish Hospital and works with the foundation at St. Paul's School. Steve serves on the board

of the United Way Northshore and contributes to Project Red Light, an organization that raises money to research Lou Gehrig's disease, while Paul is active with the Race for Life cancer research effort. •

— *Robin Shannon*

BEST *Owners*

NICK BAZAN

RioMar, La Boca

Year opened: Rio Mar opened in August 2000; La Boca opened in June 2006

Years at establishment: nine

Nick Bazan can trace his culinary roots back to 1986, when he was 16 and cleaning bathrooms, washing dishes and pretty much doing anything that needed to be done at Shoney's for extra cash.

Bazan earned a degree in business from Spring Hill College in Mobile, Ala., and returned to New Orleans where tourism and restaurants were thriving. He cut his culinary teeth working in front of the house at restaurants such as Galatoire's and Mr. B's.

"I started falling in love with the environment of pleasing the customer," Bazan said.

In 1998, Bazan met his business partner, Adolfo Garcia, who suggested he open his own establishment. Bazan was reluctant because, he said, he lacked the "know-how" to start from scratch and feared the high failure rate

of new restaurants.

"I thought it was a possibility, but he (Garcia) knew what he was going into," Bazan said.

Garcia previously owned a restaurant, Criollo, on the corner of Iberville and Decatur streets.

The duo bypassed the French Quarter and Uptown and chose the Warehouse District, which benefits from a plethora of conventioners and a strong base of local diners. They opened Rio Mar in 2000.

Though a long way from his dishwashing days, he still works 16-hour shifts twice a week. Bazan transported his hard work ethic, family values and food from his native Argentina. And although some people weren't familiar with some items on the menu, he was confident Rio Mar would succeed.

"New Orleans was ready for the next change in culinary arts, which was ethnic," Bazan said. "You've got to take some risks in life, and the first risk was opening the restaurant." •

—L. Kasimu Harris

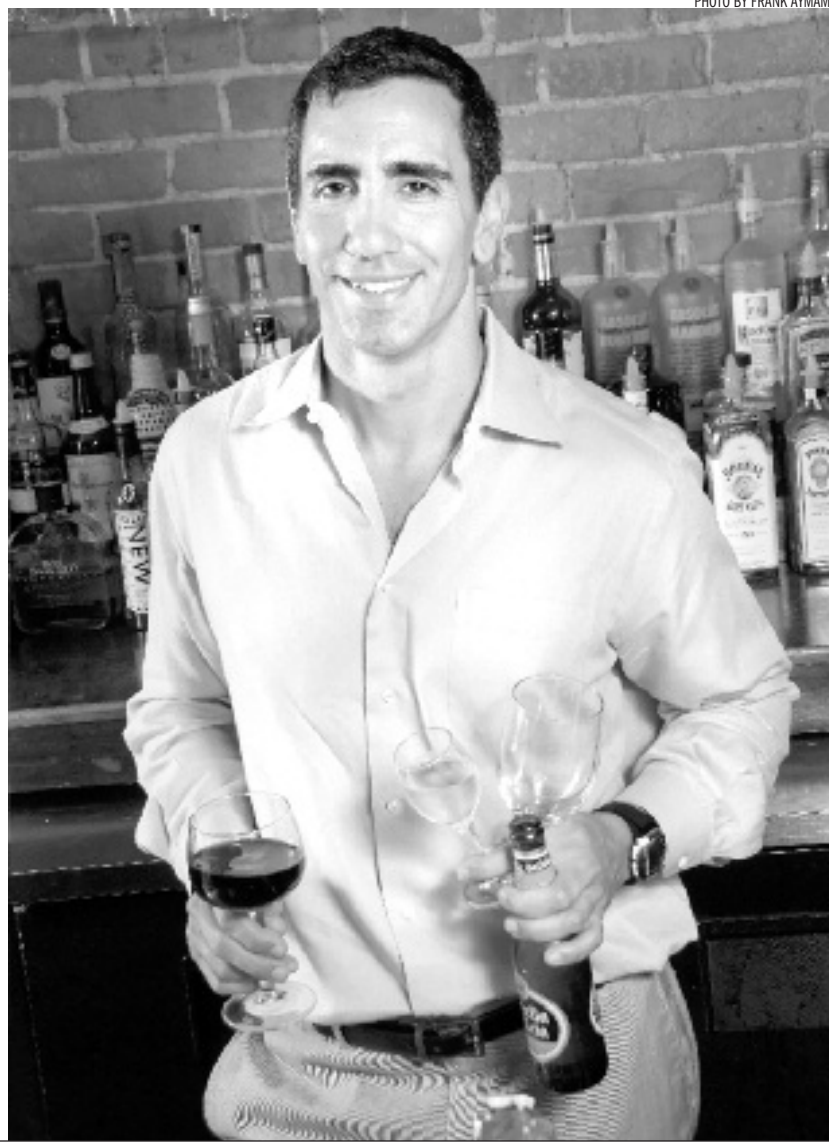


PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMAMI

BEST *Owners*

LARRY KATZ

Dots Diner

Year opened: 1996

Years at establishment: 14

Eight years ago, Larry Katz wanted to create a memorable tagline or slogan that would best express what Dots Diner is all about.

He recalls throwing ideas off people, when he jokingly said, "Let's just have an old mother or grandmother-type voice say, 'I'm not your mama, but you're always at home at Dots Diner.'"

"It really gets across our image of who we are — good value," Katz said. "Home-cooked-to-order food and large portions, and people think their mother or grandmother is in the kitchen back there cooking your food for you."

The name "Dots" comes from Katz's late grandmother, Dorothy, and much of the menu consists of "memories of the comfort foods my Grandma Dorothy used to cook."

The founder of Dots Diner has established the casual, family-style diner in seven locations in New Orleans. The original Dots Diner opened in 1996 on Airline Drive with four employees, including Katz. The family chain now has 100 employees. There are four diners open 24 hours serving breakfast, lunch and dinner all day.

Dots Diner originated from Katz's 20 years in the clothing business when he would stop at small diners about five times a week to drink coffee and eat meals. When he moved to New Orleans, Camellia Grill became his hangout.

"I blended those three experiences into Dots. You could hang out at a diner all day, eat home-cooked food, drink as much coffee as you want and nobody would bother you," Katz said.

In the community, Katz and his diners contributed more than \$15,000 in 2009 to various causes, including the Humane Society of Louisiana, through donation boxes at the restaurants.

Katz represents Jefferson Parish on the City Park Improvement Association Board of Directors, in addition to serving on the board of WYES-TV, vice chairman of the Causeway Commission and the Pelican State Pachyderm Club.

He was a co-founder of the Jefferson Chamber of Commerce and Jefferson Dollars for Scholars and served as past chairman of the East Jefferson Council of the Chamber of Commerce. Katz recently finished a three-year term representing the Gulf South on the U.S. Tourism and Travel Advisory Board. •

—Tommy Santora

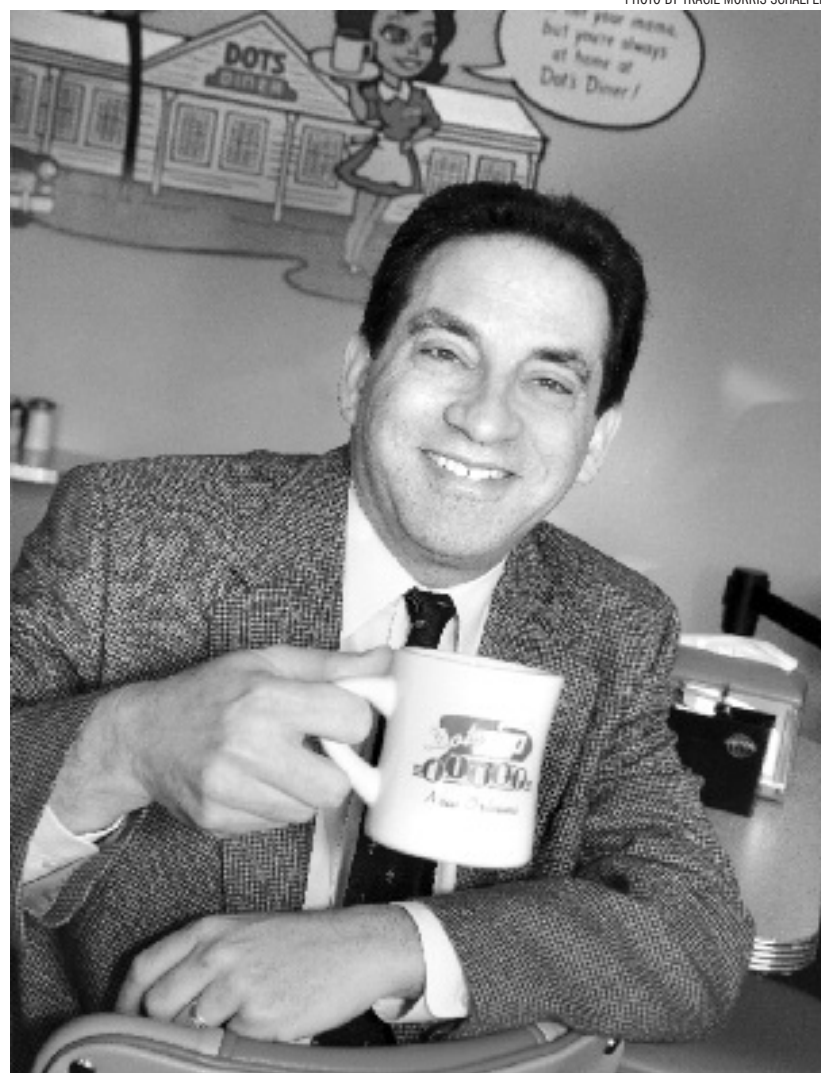


PHOTO BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAEFER

BEST *Owners*

GARY WOLLERMAN

GW Fins

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Year opened: March 2001
Years at establishment: nine

Gary Wollerman takes a detached view of how the economy may affect his French Quarter restaurant, GW Fins.

"We opened up here in March of 2001 and not long after that came the attacks of 9/11," Wollerman said. "Naturally, I wondered what effect that might have on our new business."

Next, there was Hurricane Katrina and most recently, a recession.

"I suppose I should have been worried about all of this going on just as we were trying to get established," said Wollerman. "But because we were a new business, we had the capital to give ourselves some time. It might have been rougher for us if we had been a well-established business experiencing a big dip in sales."

"But we were going from zero," Wollerman said, "So I thought, 'What the heck, let's just stick with it.'"

Wollerman has been similarly calm about the effects of the economic downturn.

"Our sales in 2009 actually increased over 2008," he said. "And the fourth quarter was great with all of the momentum from the Saints."

A former chief operating officer for Ruth's Chris Steak House, Wollerman launched his culinary industry career when he was a student at the University of Kansas in the late 1960s, working at a nearby eatery called the Jayhawk Café.

"It was a great little place," Wollerman said. "It was owned by an older couple, and during the daytime Lucille (Hoch, co-owner) made hot plate specials for the construction workers and professors who came there. But at night it turned into a kid's bar."

That experience was enough to convince Wollerman, who graduated from with a degree in communications, to remain in the restau-



rant business.

"I just liked it right from the start," he said. "But I have never been that big on working in the back of the house. My focus has always been on the beverage side, on bartending, but also management and service supervision."

Wollerman's community contributions focus on education, with

GW Fins recently sponsoring a monthlong contest at Lusher Charter School for students to show their pride in the New Orleans Hornets. Twenty students visited the restaurant for lunch with Hornets' center Aaron Gray, Wollerman and executive chef Tenney Flynn, and they received tickets to the Insectarium. •

— Garry Boulard

BEST *Owners*

JARRED ZERINGUE

Eat New Orleans

PHOTO BY TRACIE MORRIS SCHAEFER

Year opened: April 26, 2006
Years at establishment: four

When Jarred Zeringue told his mother and grandmother he would be serving their recipes in his new restaurant, Eat New Orleans, they loved the idea.

"They still can't believe that a lot of their recipes are being sold for money," Zeringue said. "The most basic things I cook that are their recipes sell better than the fancier stuff."

Zeringue opened the restaurant four years ago in partnership with friend, David Smith, after becoming bored as an architectural drafter.

"I run the restaurant, and he does the accounting and book-keeping," said Zeringue, who also does some of the cooking along with his chef, Brandon Palomo.

He wanted to preserve south Louisiana's traditional cuisine and its inherent slow cooking style, which he felt was being lost to a rushed lifestyle and a mentality that new and easy is better.

Among the Cajun dishes he offers are chicken and andouille gumbo, stews, crawfish pie and pork tenderloin with smothered onions, a take on a dish he grew up eating.

In running Eat New Orleans, Zeringue has found a chance to support community causes close to his heart.

"That's something I've always wanted to do, support the things I believe in," he said.

He supports Dining for Life, an annual NO/AIDS Task Force fundraiser, and Halloween New Orleans, in support of Project Lazarus. He annually participates in the French Quarter Festival and also gives to Bridge House.

Eat New Orleans is Zeringue's first restaurant. Even though he has



no plans to open another location, he said he's enjoying his success.

"When we opened, I never really thought that we would be ... as big as it is," he said.

Zeringue describes his business as constantly growing, helped by the New Orleans Saints' success, Mardi Gras, conventions and now, the festival season.

Eat New Orleans also draws a neighborhood crowd, repeat customers and tourists referred from hotels.

"I would just like to explore different areas, maybe in a food product, maybe in a cookbook," he said. "I want to just be prepared for the opportunities as they come." •

— Diana Chandler

Legends

RALPH BRENNAN

Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group owner

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Age: 58

Family: wife, Susan; children, Kathryn, 25, Patrick, 22, Kristen, 20

Years in industry: 29

Ralph Brennan seemed destined to enter the restaurant industry from the start.

In high school, he worked at Brennan's on Royal Street. And even when he veered off the restaurant path to earn an MBA from Tulane University and work as an accountant at PricewaterhouseCoopers, he always knew he would return to the dining business.

"It was in my blood," said Brennan, a third-generation member of New Orleans' most prominent restaurant family.

In 1981, he worked in the management training program at Commander's Palace before moving on to become the general manager at Mr. B's. In 1991, Brennan went out on his own with his sister, Cindy, to open Bacco. Eventually, he bought out his sister's share and opened the Redfish Grill in 1997.

He branched out beyond New Orleans in 2001 by opening the Jazz Kitchen in Disneyland. In 2003, he opened Ralph's on the Park.

For Brennan, people are what make his work rewarding and exciting on a daily basis.

"It's the staff — the dishwashers, the chefs, the managers, everyone. It's making the customers happy. I look forward to it every day," Brennan said.

His love of people extends beyond his business and to his work with the community. For 15 years, he has been on the board of Children's Hospital and helped the hospital form its partnership with Touro Infirmary. He has also served as chairman of the New Orleans Morial Convention Center and the New Orleans Business Council, and as president of the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau.



Brennan's charitable contributions include donating food and cookbooks to various charities. Ralph's on the Park has routinely donated dinners for school raffles and charitable functions.

And Brennan has no plans to stop. Even though Katrina and the recession slowed down expansion plans, he is looking to open new restaurants.

"If you don't grow, you get stagnant," Brennan said. "There are

more things I want to do."

Brennan's involvement in the industry has had a national impact, having served as chairman and president of the National Restaurant Association in 1995-96. The NRA's Education Foundation inducted him into its College of Diplomats for his commitment to culinary training. •

—Fritz Esker

Legends

BERNARD "RANDY" GUSTE

Antoine's Restaurant

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Age: 60

Family: wife, Henrietta; children, Bernard Jr., Henry, Jules and Josephine

Years at establishment: 25

Bernard "Randy" Guste spends his post-culinary days in Lacombe, fishing and gardening with his wife, Henrietta, a retired school teacher.

The serene respite is in contrast to Guste's active career as manager and proprietor of the legendary, family-owned and operated Antoine's Restaurant, where he worked for 25 years before retiring in 2003 for health reasons.

Does he miss the business?

"Sometimes, I miss it a lot," said Guste, who had the opportunity to serve icons such as Pope John Paul II and members of Carnival royalty throughout his tenure.

Guste became involved in the family establishment as a cashier in 1967 when he was a student at Loyola University studying language and sociology.

After graduating, Guste worked at restaurants and hotels throughout the nation to learn more about the culinary industry. When he

returned to New Orleans at age 30, Antoine's ownership appointed Guste manager and proprietor, making Guste answerable for all aspects of the business to his family and the public.

In those roles, Guste managed about 140 employees. Most had extensive culinary experience and groomed Guste into becoming a successful manager.

"All I can do is think about the characters I worked with," Guste said. "The staff that worked for me were legends, some of them with more than 50 years of experience at that restaurant. And to have them serve under me with me as their leader, looking back, was probably a very rare opportunity."

Guste notes equal meekness as one chosen to carry on his family's legacy.

"My whole career was a blessing to me, to be able to serve in such a simple way," he said. "I'm very fortunate to have been able to serve in the capacity of proprietor of Antoine's Restaurant — a world-class restaurant. I worked for that privilege, but what it all boils down to is it was a gift." •

—Nayita Wilson



New Orleans
CITYBUSINESS
2010
CULINARY
Connoisseurs

S P O N S O R E D B Y :



Mercedes-Benz
Mercedes-Benz of New Orleans



MERCEDES-BENZ OF NEW ORLEANS
3727 VETERANS MEMORIAL BLVD., METAIRIE, LA (504) 456-3727

MERCEDESNO.LA.COM

Mercedes-Benz of New Orleans is proud to sponsor the CityBusiness 2010 Culinary Connoisseurs. New Orleans cuisine is second to none and we all take pride in the reputation our restaurants bring to our city. They set the standards for others to follow. At Mercedes-Benz, we know a thing or two about setting standards. Take, for instance, the C300 Sport Sedan which boasts a V-6 engine with a strong — yet remarkably lightweight — aluminum cylinder block. That's how it can hit 60 mph in 7.1 seconds and still get 26 highway miles to the gallon. The C300 Sport Sedan builds on the commitment to excellence that Mercedes-Benz has displayed for over 100 years.