

BEST OF DINING

BY ERIC CORMIER
PHOTOS BY JOSEPH VIDRINE

In Acadiana, cooking is a way of life. It's also a family affair and a community event. Home cooks abound, so the pros cooking in the region's restaurants know they're gonna be put to the test daily — and they are up to the challenge. In that spirit, here's our list of those who made the cut for this year's Acadiana Profile Best of Dining.



SEAFOOD
PLATTER

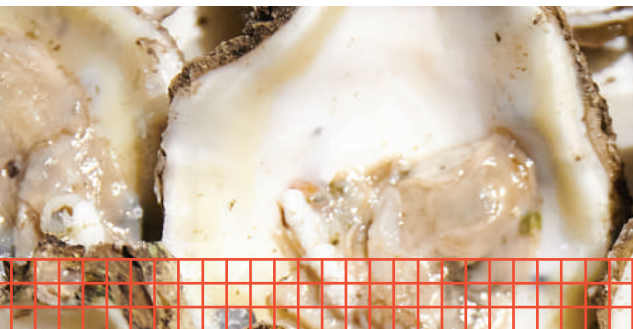
CRABMEAT
STUFFED
EGGROLLS

CHICKEN AND
SAUSAGE
GUMBO

LUMP CRAB MEAT
AND BOILED SHRIMP
SALAD

RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

CAFÉ JOSEPHINE



337-662-0008
818 Napoleon Ave.
Sunset
cafejosephine-
sunset.com



SOMETIMES a person does not need to taste food from a certain restaurant to know if the vittles prepared there are good.

The proverbial grapevine (person-to-person or social media) along with a few paragraphs from foodies and writers in a newspaper, newsletter or magazine will do just the trick for developing a restaurant's must-eat-at reputation.

But if a person is still in doubt, call and see how long it takes to get a reservation. If it will take a week or two to get a table at the place, then it would not be wrong to assume the restaurant is top-notch.

For example, a person can't just walk into Café Josephine on any given night and expect a table and plate of something like crawfish nachos, lamb chops or tuna tacos. No, a food lover definitely needs to call and talk to one of the restaurant's staffers to see what date and time is open on the reservation list.

This destination restaurant in Sunset is owned and operated by 58-year-old Carencro native Chef Troy Bijeaux.

Eaters from across America visit Café Josephine to eat food created by Bijeaux who for all intents and purposes is a kitchen savant.



PRIME 14 OUNCE
RIBEYE CAP



3 Dishes to try

1
CRABMEAT STUFFED EGG ROLLS One of the best finger foods a connoisseur will find on the menu. A fried roll stuffed with delicate crabmeat, pecan pepper jelly, spicy mayo and Sriracha ... bliss.

2
SEAFOOD PLATTER Choices, oh what does one do? To eat a seafood platter consisting of catfish, shrimp, seafood cake, shrimp en brochette, two stuffed shrimp and seafood rice. Does one eat all this deliciousness grilled or fried?

3
PRIME 14 OUNCE RIBEYE CAP This is one of Café Josephine's top menu items. First you have to watch Chef Bijeaux prepare the meat on his grill. The performance and finished product are both sublime.



SEAFOOD PLATTER



“Starting on Tuesday up until Saturday, people are lined up to eat here,” Bijeaux explains. “For us, the secret to success is quality of product, service and more importantly God’s blessing. I never went to cooking school and never ran a restaurant before. It’s amazing what this restaurant has done since we opened.”

Bijeaux sources fresh food from Louisiana growers and harvesters.

Those ingredients lead to dishes like a flavorful corn and crab bisque, lump crab meat and boiled shrimp salad and seafood pasta (angel hair pasta tossed with a seafood cream sauce, shrimp crawfish, jalapeños and green onions).

Yet, the most captivating aspect of the restaurant and menu is the open fire grill situated behind Café Josephine’s bar.

Here, Bijeaux holds court while cooking steak, pork and oysters.

“Everybody loves the grilling area. The fire. The aroma. And the food. It makes this place,” he says.

The menu is comprehensive, but Bijeaux also has nightly surprises on the board next to the greeting station a few feet from the open air grill.

None of this is available to the intrepid person who thinks they can just walk in a grab a seat. Understand this is not a pomp and circumstance culinary environment.

A reservation is the only way in because the demand is great. Chef Bijeaux’s fan club is huge and consists of pleased palates.

Be patient and make a reservation; you already know the food will be good.

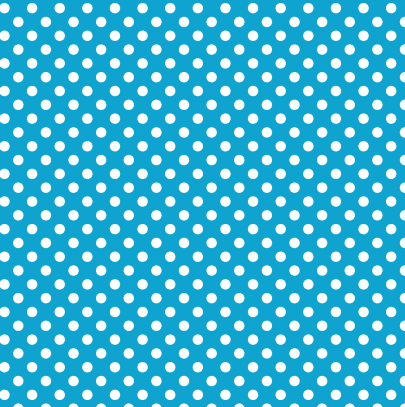


THE CHEF

TROY BIJEAUX

Chef Bijeaux understands the nuances of vegetables, meats and seasonings and has assembled a menu with dishes that leave Café Josephine visitors wanting more. Bijeaux likes to say that the eatery’s theme is “food with attitude.” At an open fire grill, Bijeaux prepares steaks, pork chops, lamb chops and oysters all the while living his kitchen creed.





Best Brunch

The Bus Stop Bistro

Preparing fresh and locally sourced food is what drives Jay Thornhill and Chef Charles vonAspern. Brunch is served from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Sunday. The menu includes biscuits, shrimp and grits and an Andouille omelet ... lawd have mercy.

3823 N. University Ave.
Carenco
thebusstopbistro.com



CHEF OF THE YEAR

CHEF WANDA LUGO

FAVORITE DISH TO PREPARE?

Pasticho which is plantain lasagna. It is made with mozzarella cheese, ground beef and the plantain. That is a favorite dish made on certain days. Call ahead.



Venezuelan food has three general influences which are the indigenous tribes that inhabited the area, followed by Spanish and African due to colonization and slavery. Chef Wanda Lugo brought those influences to the Hub City when she moved here with her family in 2006.

Since opening Patacon Latin Cuisine in 2015 Lugo has fused a few Louisiana and Gulf Coast flavor patterns and ingredients into her culinary repertoire.

The end result is delicious dishes that elevate customers into family who love South

American and Caribbean flavor patterns.

"I'm very methodical in the way I prepare food. I love seeing people enjoy my food," Lugo says.

Amid the dizzying and delectable array of empanadas, patacones and arepas, diners will notice ingredients like crawfish and dishes seasoned with a hint of Bayou spice. The restaurant's namesake "patacon" is a prime menu item. A patacon a fried green plantain sandwich dressed with cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, avocado, and a special sauce. Fillings include shredded beef, cheese, chicken or pork.

BEST TAKEOUT

Poche's Market and Restaurant

Since 1962, this meat market and restaurant has been producing boudin and sausage that have lips smacking all over the countryside. Yet, these folks are serious about takeout food. Daily offerings include smothered beef, pork backbone stew, crawfish étouffée, smothered rabbit, pork roast, corn maque choux and sweet potato crunch.

3015 MAIN HIGHWAY #A • BREAUX BRIDGE • POCHE.S.COM



BEST MUSIC

LAKEVIEW PARK AND BEACH

The folks that own this rest and relaxation hamlet in Eunice — situated in both Acadia and St. Landry parishes — believe music is important. The event lineup (acts perform in a barn) have included: the Steve Riley Trio, Dikki Du & the Zydeco Krewe, Janson Matte Band and Geno Delafosse and French Rockin Boogie just to name a few.

1717 Veterans Memorial Highway • Eunice • lvpark.com

Best Place for Special Occasion

The St. John Restaurant

Some food lovers refer to this restaurant in one of Acadiana's most historic cities as an oasis. "You will literally feel like you have died and gone to heaven," said one fan. The restaurant and menu will fill the souls of families and friends. Bayou Teche's positive vibes are strong here.

203 N. New Market St. • St. Martinville
thestjohnrestaurant.com



For more on D.I.'s check out page 58

BEST FAMILY SPOT

D.I.'S CAJUN RESTAURANT

Where can you find a landing strip in a rice field, eat great Cajun food, listen to awesome music and get a hug? D.I.'s in Basile. Owner Sherry Fruge's goal is for anyone who visits the restaurant to understand, "I want them to feel like they are eating at home."

6561 Evangeline Highway • Basile • discajunrestaurant.com

BEST DISH

Red Snapper

Pan-seared red snapper filet topped with a New Orleans-style Meunière and lump crabmeat served with rice pilaf and grilled vegetables.

Lake Charles Chef Dan Schaad is always on the hunt for an ingredient, spice, recipe or technique that he can experiment with at **Pujo Street Cafe**.

A few years ago, he tasted a fish dish at an eatery in New Orleans. He was smitten. "I decided to prepare something similar. Today, the dish is one of our top sellers," he explains.

Pray tell, just what is this kitchen creation?

Pan-seared red snapper filet topped with a New Orleans-influenced Meunière with lump crab meat. The seafood is served over a bed of in-house prepared rice pilaf and brightly colored grilled vegetables.

"The crab meat in the Meunière is what we added," Schaad says. "A lot of people come in looking for seafood dishes, and we upped the ante."

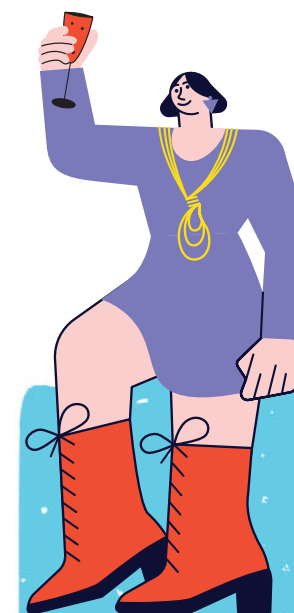
901 Ryan St. • Lake Charles



THE TOPPER: The Meunière is prepared the traditional French-influenced way with one addition: Louisiana Blue Crab ... the white meat ... rich and decadent flavor.

THE SIDESHOW: Schaad wants natural flavors to seep out of his food ... the rice is perfectly seasoned, soft and fluffy, and the grilled veggies take on the subtle flavor of the fire grill.

THE SHOW STOPPER: The pan fried red snapper filet that is dusted with a simple seasoning mix of salt, black pepper and garlic powder.



BIGGEST WINE SELECTION

MARCELLO'S

The owners tout their restaurant as the "authentic Italian experience" and wine is the backbone of their assertion. The wine list includes rosé, sparkling, whites, and reds from France, Italy, California, Oregon and Argentina. A plate of Italian sausage, bell peppers, roasted onions, fried gnocchi, red wine rustica and burrata with a glass of vino here is culinary heaven.

340 Kaliste Saloom Road Suite C • Lafayette
marcelloslafayette.com

BEST COCKTAIL PROGRAM

The Taproom At Crust Pizza Company

Mixologist Jace Wallace and the staff seamlessly recreate old standard cocktails and flavorful new creations. Regarded as the Lake Charles area avant-garde bartender, Wallace has a fan base stretching from Houston to New Orleans. Try a Sugartown 'Rita featuring cold-pressed watermelon juice from the fruit harvested in Sugartown.

3479 NELSON ROAD
LAKE CHARLES
CRUSTPIZZACO.COM



BEST LATE NIGHT EATS

MEL'S DINER

Workers, late night revelers and families know there is one eatery that stands as a beacon for staple breakfast and stick-to-your-bones dish eating in Lafayette. Mel's needs no introduction in SWLA and newbies quickly learn this is the best 24-hour restaurant the moment they bite into a biscuit. All other menu choices are just as delicious.

2956 Johnston St. • Lafayette • themelsdiner.com



Best Patio

Regatta Seafood and Steakhouse

Regatta's patio allows visitors to soak in the aroma of Lake Arthur while enjoying the visual awesomeness of trees covered in Spanish moss and native wildlife. This open air patio is a prime location to test the notion that food and drink always taste better outdoors.

508 Hawkeye Ave.
Lake Arthur
regattarestaurantla.com

BEST FOR DATE NIGHT

Pamplona Tapas Bar



The romantic Pamplona experience first starts with the walk on Jefferson Street (any time of the year). When a couple enters Pamplona they are embraced by the soft lights, dark hues and an atmosphere infused with sophistication. Lastly, intimacy is nurtured with delicious small plates and wine. Love can't help but develop.

631 Jefferson St. • Lafayette • pamplonatapas.com