

DINING

Mardi Gras Cafe offers taste of N'awlins cuisine

BY KEELY WYGNON
STAFF WRITER

Chef Louie Finnan lights up every room he enters with his warm personality and smile. A native of New Orleans, Finnan brought his beloved Bourbon Street to metro Detroit by opening Mardi Gras Cafe on May 23. Located on Franklin Road, right behind Tom's Oyster Bar, Mardi Gras Cafe captures the spirit and flavors of Mardi Gras. Festoons of purple, gold and green greet diners as they enter Chef Louie's home away from home. Carnival masks decorate the walls, and a wrought iron railing is strung with colorful beads.

"Everything here means something to us," said Finnan. Mardi Gras Cafe is a family operation, and he aims to please. The official Mardi Gras colors — emerald for love, gold for loyalty, and purple for sincerity, describe Chef Louie's approach to food, and entertaining.

"I feel very strongly, passionate, and privileged to serve the people here in metro Detroit," he said. "When people eat my cuisine, it's an honor."

A native of New Orleans, Chef Louie has been involved in the restaurant business since he was nine years old and working at his grandparents bar & grill on Rampart Street.

"My grandmother told me if you don't do it well, don't do it," he said explaining that all of his menu items are like his children, "special."

Mardi Gras Cafe
Where: 29110 Franklin Road, (near the corner of Northwestern Highway), Southfield, (810) 356-4972
Hours: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday; 5-11 p.m. Saturday; closed Sunday
Menu: Authentic Creole and Cajun specialties
Reservations: No
Atmosphere: Festive, casual
Price: Moderate. Entrees range from \$9.95 to \$15.95
Credit Cards: All major accepted
Entertainment: 7-10 p.m. Tuesdays

The menu notes the distinction between Cajun and Creole cooking. "I want Detroiters to understand that not all food from Bayou Country is spicy," he said. "It's exciting food — it has a lot of intense flavor. We try to balance the vinegar with sweet, use fresh herbs, and dried peppers, which tend to be less abrasive. While Cajun dishes get much of their distinctive taste from a strong mix of cayenne pepper and other spices, the hallmark of the Creole food is its flavorful mix of sauces and textures."

House specialties include Barbecue Shrimp — sautéed, not grilled, in a spicy, smoke-laced sauce and served with warm French bread to absorb any remaining sauce; Crawfish Alexander, sautéed crawfish tails in a Creole cream sauce

spiked with brandy; and Louisiana Crab Cakes, made from lump crab meat combined with green onions, sweet peppers, celery and homemade French bread crumbs.

Mardi Gras Cafe offers soups, French Market Salads, appetizers, Cajun and Creole Entrees, Carnival Pastas, Carnival Steaks, Po-Boys and Burgers, a variety of side dishes including Zucchini Saint Charles and Jambalaya, and "Nawlins" Desserts — Bananas Foster Shortcake, French Quarter Bread Pudding, Mississippi River Pecan Pie, and Praline Creole Cheesecake.

Finnan, who brought his style of cooking to Louie's on the River in downtown Detroit, and Norman's Eton Street Station in Birmingham, moved to metro Detroit in April 1992.

Roman J. Gronkowski, treasurer of the City of Southfield, and his wife, Judy, were among the guests invited to a VIP Sneak Preview on May 28. "It's fun and festive," they said. "It's our first chance to go to New Orleans. The food was good."

Their table mates, Jon Kuhn of Southfield, and Southfield's 46th District Court Judge, Stephen Cooper, agreed. "The shrimp was good," said Kuhn. "The turkey was excellent," added Judge Cooper.

Chef Louie said every Tuesday will be "Fat Tuesday" at Mardi Gras Cafe. Bon Temp Roule — "Let the Good Times Roll," will play jazzy New Orleans music 7-10 p.m.



STAFF PHOTO BY JERRY ZALOTSKA

Taste of N'awlins: Every day is Mardi Gras at the newly opened Mardi Gras Cafe where Chef Louie Finnan serves authentic Creole and Cajun specialties for lunch and dinner.

RESTAURANT SPECIALS

Send information about special dinners, new restaurants, restaurant renovations, restaurant anniversaries, and menu changes for consideration in Restaurant Specials to: Keely Wygnon, Taste/Entertainment editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., 3625 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. Or fax information to (313) 691-7279.

FABULOUS FEATS

- The Lark, 6430 Farmington Road, West Bloomfield - Fifteenth Anniversary Dinner 7 p.m. Monday, June 10. Cost: \$76 per person. Call (810) 661-4466.
- Cafe Cortina, 30715 W. 10 Mile Road, Farmington Hills, "Una Cena d'estate" 7 p.m. Wednesday, June 19 in rich European Garden Room, an Italian Summer Dinner with music by Pino Marelli, \$60 per person, (810) 474-3033.

- Oakland Community College, Second Annual Culinary Classic, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, June 22 with an outdoor champagne brunch. Seminars by food and wine experts, restaurant tasting, silent auction, entertainment. Cost \$50 per person. Call (810) 471-6340 or Ticketmaster (810) 645-6606.
- Morton's of Chicago, Southfield, His & Her Cigar Dinner for Couples Only, 6:30 p.m. Friday, June 28. Cost \$220 per couple, (810) 354-6006.

DINNER THEATER
• "Just Be Patient" opens Saturday, June 1, Genitti's Hole-In-The-Wall - 108 E. Main, Northville, (810) 349-0522, seven course meal along with show. "Just Be Patient," is a musical comedy spin-off from the hit TV series "E.R." Laugh with the characters as they involve the audience.

BALLS & BENEFITS
• Take Father to a Jazz Brunch, noon to 3 p.m. Sunday, June 16, Schoolcraft College Waterman Center, Livonia. Sponsored by the Southeastern Michigan Jazz Association. Tickets \$20 for SEMJA members, \$25 for non-members, call (810) 474-2720.

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