



**Connie Jo's Place**

by Rich Belmont

I suppose it was inevitable: Soul Food is now available in Dubuque! It's authentic and every bit as good as the Soul Food you get in the Deep South. OK, so right now you might be asking: what is Soul Food anyway?

You can say it is the cuisine of both African Americans and Native Americans residing in the Southeastern United States. These people do not have much money so it is necessary for them to use every bit of every pig or chicken and every part of every vegetable they can get their hands on. Cooks add onions, garlic, thyme and bay leaf as flavor enhancers and do a lot of frying and BBQ. Soul Food is often used to bring families together for celebrations. It is often said the cooks put their hearts and souls into it.

This is certainly true at Connie Jo's Place at the corner of Ninth and Iowa Streets in Dubuque. This modest and unpretentious restaurant was formerly called Chuck N Jo's and has been owned and operated by Connie Jo Miller for 6 years already. She is a native of Dubuque and hails from a well known family. Her aunt and uncle were the sponsors of Miller Riverview Park.

Connie Jo started her cooking career at a very early age. She learned the basics at Ms Pat's Wheelhouse in Dubuque. After 4 years she moved on to become the Head Breakfast Cook at Buttermilk Ski Resort and Lodge in Aspen, CO. She returned to the kitchen of Ms Pat's for 4 more years and then went to learn German cuisine at the Arthur House in Platteville, WI. Connie Jo wanted to develop skills in different regional cooking styles so she also studied Southern style cooking and Tex Mex at the Driskill Grill in the Driskill Hotel, the oldest hotel in Austin, TX. She was also a chef in Alexandria, LA where she learned to cook Cajun, Creole and Southern style. During her prestigious career she has cooked for numerous luminaries including Bo Derek, John Denver, Walter Payton, Lionel Richie and President Bill Clinton.



So it should come as no surprise Connie Jo's Place is now serving Soul Food. It's available all day Friday, Saturday and Sunday. To insure its authenticity Connie Jo persuaded JJ "Chef Soul" to come into her kitchen as Soul Food Chef. JJ (pictured at right with Connie Jo) is from the Carolinas but grew up in Manhattan. He was a chef at the Collettin River Plantation Golf Club in South Carolina where he cooked for Jack Nicklaus. He was also a chef for Sylvia Woods, the Queen of Soul Food, at her restaurant in Harlem, New York. Sylvia's was established in 1962 and is famous for outstanding Soul Food.

To give you an idea of some of the treats in store for you on week-ends at Connie Jo's I have compiled a small list:



- **BBQ Beef Ribs** – These are tasty fall-off-the-bone beef spare ribs prepared with a homemade dry rub, baked 4 to 5 hours and covered with a root beer BBQ sauce. Pictured top of facing page with BBQ pork ribs and Mac N Cheese.)
- **Catfish** – Iowa farm raised filets are served just the way you like them: fried, baked or blackened.
- **Hushpuppies** – Balls of cornmeal batter are simply deep fried but they are so good!
- **Gumbo** – A stew or soup consisting of a strong flavored stock with the "holy trinity" of celery, bell peppers and onions. Lima beans are added and the thickener used in



- this version is Okra. Chef JJ's gumbo is made with chicken and sausage.
- **Jamaican Jerk Chicken** – Jerk is a style of cooking where meat is dry rubbed or wet marinated with a hot spicy mixture. In this restaurant your choice of either white or dark chicken is marinated for 24 hours in a homemade jerk sauce made from allspice, red onions, lemon, rum and habanera peppers. The flavor is unusual and pleasant and just a little on the hot side.
- **BBQ Pork Loins** – Baby Back Pork Loins are covered with a homemade hand rub and char-grilled.
- **Jamaican Beef Patties** – If you have never had these you need to try them. Pastry crusts made from coco bread (meaning it is derived from coconut milk) are stuffed with lean ground beef, onions, habanera peppers, and thyme and baked into turnovers.

**Connie Jo's Place**  
890 Iowa Street, Dubuque, IA 52001  
563-582-2705 •E-Mail: conniejospice@gmail.com  
**HOURS:** Breakfast: Mon-Fri, 7 a.m.-2 p.m., Sat: 6 am -12:30 p.m., Sun: 6 am - 1 pm  
Lunch: Mon - Fri: 11 am - 2 pm  
Soul Food: Fri: 7a.m.-9 p.m., Sat: 4-9 pm, Sun: 1-7 p.m.  
**DINING STYLE:** Come as you are **NOISE:** Conversational  
**RECOMMENDATIONS:** Cinnamon Roll, Monster Omelet, Big D's, Biscuits Under Deluxe, Hot Beef, Blue Plate Specials, Carmichael Slammer, BBQ Beef Ribs, BBQ Chicken, BBQ Pork Ribs, Jamaican Jerk Chicken, Collard Greens, Okra, Mac N Cheese, Fried Chicken, Peach Cobbler  
**LIQUOR SERVICE:** None  
**PRICES:** Breakfast: \$2.19 - \$8.99, Lunch: \$2.29 - \$7.29  
Soul Food: \$12.99 - \$20.99 (for 2)  
**PAY OPTIONS:** Cash, Debit, Visa, MC, Discover, NO checks  
**ACCESSIBILITY:** Front door, Restrooms. Proudly Accessible DBQ.  
**KIDS POLICY:** Menu, High Chair, Booster, Kids Room with TV  
**RESERVATIONS:** Yes **CATERING:** Yes **TAKE OUT:** Yes **DELIVERY:** No  
**PARKING:** On Street & City Parking Garage

- **Mac N Cheese** – The Connie Jo's style is shell macaroni baked with a blend of mild and sharp cheddar, mozzarella and provolone cheeses and covered with sharp cheddar sauce.
- **Collard Greens** – I am surprised by how good these greens are! The plant is in the same species as cabbage and broccoli and grows like kale. The dark green edible leaves have been a food source for over 2000 years. Chef JJ cooks them with smoked bacon and ham hocks or smoked turkey. The word "collard" is actually the mispronunciation of the word "colewort" the ancient name for cabbage plant.
- **Incidentally**, all soul food dinners are accompanied by homemade cornbread. This is a good thing particularly when you are having collard greens. Cornbread is often used to soak up the collard broth containing meat juices. It's rich in nutrients and is delicious!



- **Golden Plantains** – These are a type of banana. They tend to be firmer and lower in sugar content than dessert bananas so they are usually cooked. Chef JJ simply slices and fries them.
- **Okra** – A common dish in the southern United States. Okra is a strange plant because it is cultivated for its edible green seed pods which are actually fruits. However, the fruits are harvested when immature and are eaten as a vegetable. When the pods are cooked they exude a goo or slime. Some people like them this way but most of us do not. So Connie Jo eliminates every bit of the goo by coating them with a dry breading and frying them only when they are ordered.

Soul Food lovers know after a wonderful meal of comfort foods dessert is in order. It's always a good idea to finish your Soul Food dinner with a dessert of the Deep South. The current menu has four of them and they are all very, very good!



First there is the Peach Cobbler. Connie Jo's version of this desert contains a batter placed in the bottom of a large baking pan. Then sliced peaches are placed on top of the batter. During baking the peaches sink through the batter and end up on the bottom of the pan. A cobbler never has a bottom crust! The Sweet Potato Pie is surprisingly sweet just like its name. Sweet potatoes are boiled, peeled and then mashed while warm. Then cinnamon, condensed milk, eggs and brown and white sugar are added. The mixture is baked in a pastry pie crust. The third dessert is Bread Pudding consisting of at least 4 different kinds of bread mixed with raisins, eggs, nutmeg and allspice then baked and drizzled with caramel rum sauce. The fourth dessert is Banana Wafer Pudding. Layers of Nilla wafers and sliced bananas are topped with a cooked vanilla pudding.

With all this Soul Food to enjoy on week-ends it is easy to forget Connie Jo's is open every day for breakfast and lunch.

The prices are so low the copious amounts of food you are served is astonishing. With menu categories such as Piles, Buried Stuff, Steaks and Stuff and Plates it's wise to ask one of the knowledgeable and friendly servers, perhaps Stacey Rohner, Jenny Hough, or Ray Berry to help guide you.



Popular breakfasts are Big D's Pile (above) consisting of a huge mound of hash browns, scrambled eggs, cheese, bacon, sausage and ham, onions, green peppers and mushrooms. Also the BUD (Biscuits Under Deluxe): Baking powder biscuits topped with ham slices, bacon, choice of 2 eggs, cheese blend and sausage gravy served with grits, hash browns or American fries.



There is also a different breakfast special every day so you need to check the specials board. Recent specials were 2 eggs and ham steak, jerk omelet, chili cheese omelet and Southwestern benedict. This last one is like eggs benedict except the eggs are on biscuits instead of an English muffin and they are covered with sausage gravy instead of hollandaise.



The lunch menu contains many of your favorite items. There are sandwiches including French Dip, Fish, Pork T, Grilled Chicken, Bacon Cheese Burger and Ribeye Steak just to name a few. My favorite sandwich is the Carmichael Slammer. This is a specially seasoned tenderized beef patty served on a ciabatta bun with 2 slices of bacon, 2 slices of ham and Swiss and American cheese. I like to add lettuce, tomato and onion.



One of the more popular lunches is the Hot Beef Plate: old fashioned bottom round beef is slow roasted in-house and served with real mashed potatoes and gravy. Another popular one is the Meatloaf (below): a mighty loaf of straight ground beef mixed with croutons, seasonings, ketchup, French onion soup, eggs and au jus. It is also served with mashed potatoes and beef gravy.

Check the specials board at lunch time too. There is always a Blue Plate Special and they change daily. Sometimes the specials are regular menu items and sometimes they are not. Recent specials posted over several days were Tenderloin Beef Tips and Noodles, Spaghetti Pie, Scalloped Potatoes and Ham, Country Fried Chicken and Smothered Pork Chops.

It's always a good decision when you choose to end your delicious lunch with dessert. Connie Jo makes all her own pies and cookies. I asked her how she got to be such a tremendous pastry chef. She said she learned from a 72 year old master baker. I also asked her how she became so generous. She certainly is generous with her portion sizes and then there is her Baskets of Love Drive at Easter. She distributes over 2000 Easter baskets to children and more than 500 Easter pails to area nursing homes. Why does she do it? She simply responds it is her way of saying thank you to the community for supporting Connie Jo's Place.

