



Dear Orleans
by Rich Belmont

Did you know you can now enjoy authentic Creole and Cajun Cuisine in Platteville, WI? And when I say authentic I don't mean the expensive, fancy dinners you get in the tourist restaurants on Bourbon Street in the New Orleans French Quarter. No, I'm talking about the real food the local Creole and Cajun people buy everyday on the side streets of New Orleans like Basin, Canal and Desire Streets or Claiborne and Esplanade Avenues. On these roads is where the hard-to-find "Hole in the Wall" places serve true New Orleans food.



Thanks to Don Franklin, who opened Dear Orleans on July 1, 2014 we now have our very own hole in the wall restaurant for delicious Creole and Cajun cuisine. Only it's on Main Street and it's very easy to find.

Chef Don is a native Louisiana Creole. His dad passed away two weeks before he was born so he and his two older brothers were raised in New Orleans by his single mother. While his mom worked to support the family Don learned the art of cooking Creole from his grandma. He began preparing meals out of necessity but soon learned he had a flair for cooking subtle flavors out of locally available ingredients using Creole seasonings.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina Don was forced to move to Houston where he opened a restaurant called Cajun Boiling Pot. Not long after he had an opportunity to relocate to West Allis, WI where he met Amanda Uppenna who would soon become his fiancée. Amanda lived in Platteville so naturally Don decided that's where his next restaurant would be. When he took Amanda to New Orleans and showed her all the attractions of his hometown he realized how near and dear to his heart New Orleans really was. So that's how his restaurant came to be named Dear Orleans.

This is a little counter service eatery serving unusual meals with big flavors. Don is head Chef, his son-in-law, Percy Harris, is a cook and his daughter, Kara (pronounced Kyra) is the floor manager. Amanda helps out when she is not studying for her master's degree in project management.

Cajun and Creole are two distinct cultures. An oversimplified way to describe their cuisines is to think of Creole cuisine as city food and Cajun cuisine as country food. For the most part Creole food used to be considered more upscale with more expensive ingredients and Cajun was more rustic utilizing locally available meats and seafood. However, Creole and Cajun are slowly evolving into one type of cuisine.

Don explains it's all about the judicious use and careful blending of herbs and spices. New Orleans flavor is the result of the prodigious application of seasonings including garlic, bay leaf, white pepper, black peppercorn, cayenne pepper, oregano, mustard, mace, basil, thyme, celery seed, tarragon, cardamom, sweet paprika and of course the jumbo filé powder and holy trinity (bell peppers, onions and celery). Incidentally and contrary to popular belief this cuisine is all about bold flavors and not so much spicy hot.

Starters are a good way to start either lunch or dinner at Dear Orleans. Some fabulous choices include Cajun Shrimp Bites, Crawfish Pies and Alligator Bites. If you haven't had Louisiana alligator before I urge you to try it. Bite sized pieces of farm raised alligator tail are hand breaded and deep fried. They are a white meat with a chicken taste and steak-like texture and they are not at all fishy.

One of my favorite appetizers is Boudin (pronounced Boo-Dan). This is a sausage link made of pork and rice stuffed into a pork casing. Boudin is available in several flavors. This restaurant offers



pork and also seafood. You will also find Boudin Balls on the menu: the sausage filling is rolled into a ball, battered and deep fried. These are available in either the pork version or in the seafood variety made with shrimp and crawfish. These balls taste a lot like hush puppies and are quite yummy!

Dear Orleans Cajun & Creole Restaurant
125 E. Main Street, Platteville, WI 53818
608-348-5577 | Facebook.com/DearOrleans

HOURS: Mon - Sat: 11:30 a.m.-9 pm, Sun: Closed
DINING STYLE: Come as you are
NOISE LEVEL: Conversational
RECOMMENDATIONS: Pork or Seafood Boudin Balls; Boudin Sausage; Fried Catfish or Smoked Sausage Po'Boy; Philly Cheese Steak; Jambalaya; Seafood Platter; Blackened Catfish or Chicken Breast; Fried Oysters; Fried Chicken
LIQUOR SERVICE: Beer and Wine only
PRICES: \$5.39 - \$14.99
PAY OPTIONS: Cash, Debit, All Credit Cards, NO Checks
ACCESSIBILITY: Front Door & Restrooms
KIDS POLICY: No Menu; High Chairs, Booster Seats available
RESERVATIONS: Yes **CATERING:** Yes
TAKE OUT: Yes **DELIVERY:** No
PARKING: On Street



There are four cheese steaks on the menu. The Philly is chopped beefsteak with lettuce, tomato, pickle and grated cheese; the Claiborne is shrimp and steak; the Bourbon Street contains shrimp, steak and sausage; and the Canal Street is a boneless chicken breast. They are all served on French bread.



The house specialty sandwiches are the Po'Boys. These are Louisiana's versions of the grinder or hoagie. Choose Fried Shrimp, Oysters or Catfish or Smoked Sausage, Hamburger or Blackened Chicken. They are on French bread and are dressed with shredded lettuce, sliced tomato and pickle.

One Dear Orleans house specialty is a very tasty Gulf of Mexico Seafood Platter. It features shrimp, oysters, boudin balls, catfish, fries and a salad.

Other specialties include Fried Chicken hand battered with Chef Don's own blend of Creole seasonings; and the loaded baked potato called the NOLA Spud. It's topped with steak, shrimp, white cheese, bacon bits, sour cream and chives. Just in case you are wondering: NOLA is a common abbreviation for New Orleans, Louisiana.

When you are in the mood for something different I recommend the Crawfish and Shrimp Étouffée (ay-TOO- fay). This dish is considered both Cajun and Creole cuisine and is typically served with shellfish over white rice. Don prepares a very light roux in a pan and then adds in the shellfish.

Many of the dinner entrées can be ordered as either blackened or fried. I particularly enjoy the blackened versions because they are covered with Chef Don's own seasoning blend and seared in an iron skillet.



I also recommend the Combo Meals including a side dish and salad. Two of the sides are Jambalaya and Gumbo and they are definitely unique to this restaurant. I can say that with certainty since no two cooks make these dishes the same way.

Chef Don makes his Jambalaya from a shrimp tail broth and adds in smoked sausage, chunks of white chicken, rice and andouille (an-DOO-ee). This is a grainy smoked pork sausage made with garlic, hot chili peppers, onions, wine and seasonings.

Don's Gumbo is also made from scratch. This contains white chicken, smoked sausage and andouille but is more of a soup made from a roux of flour and butter. Gumbo is a much revered Cajun soup because it always contains filé (fee-lay). This is a powder made from the pulverized leaf of the sassafras tree. These trees have grown wild in south Louisiana for centuries. You know what else sassafras is used in? Root Beer!



If you love seafood, Saturday is a good day to visit Dear Orleans. Choose New Orleans style Blackened Salmon, Catfish, Tilapia, Shrimp or Fried Oysters.

I always check the black board for off menu specials. Recently my friend, Curt Martin, enjoyed a delicious Creole Shrimp Pasta and I had a Sausage Patty Po'Boy and on another day a Smothered Steak Po'Boy. They were both excellent!

Do you have a favorite restaurant you would like to see reviewed? Please send your requests, suggestions and comments to Argosy at argomark@mchsi.com.

