



ALLIGATOR CAFÉ

Chef Ivan Pugh / By Jason Hensel

Sitting in a booth at Alligator Cafe are three Lakewood debutantes, sipping wine and enjoying some fried pickles. Peanut the Pimp and his three hoes sit next to them at the front tables drinking High Lifes and waiting for whole catfish to go. This is a common scene for Chef Ivan Pugh at Alligator Cafe, a Cajun restaurant he opened in 2004 from the remains of an old Kentucky Fried Chicken. “Cajun food breaks down social barriers,” Pugh said. “The commonality is appreciation of some good grub.”

The restaurant has earned several “best of” awards from the Dallas Observer over the years—Best Cajun, Best Fried Catfish, Best Root Beer—as well as positive reviews from critics and customers alike. It all rests on Pugh’s pursuit of high-quality food with good taste.

“Mainly, I choose things I do well. Other things like jambalaya, po’ boys, gumbo and étouffée, I put on because you have to have them, and they are a part of my roots,” Pugh said. “The Cajun Fettuccine and the Crawfish Enchiladas are original recipes I came up with at some point in my career. And a few things like chicken strips, salads, burgers and wings, I have on there so I don’t turn away anyone who doesn’t dig Cajun food—it gives the menu balance.”

Pugh has lived in East Dallas since 1982, graduated from Woodrow Wilson High

School and has been in the restaurant business since he was 15 years old, waiting tables, working at an ice cream shop, frying chicken. “I started cooking in college when I was 20 and never looked back,” he said. “I guess that’s 20 years. I’ve always had cooking skills. We were poor, and I had six brothers and sisters, so cooking at home and not eating out were the order of the day. My siblings were all good at music, art or fixing things, so they spent time doing that. I liked to eat, so I spent time in the kitchen helping my mom.” Pugh worked as a catering chef in night clubs for several years. And then, Prime Time arrived.

“Dallas Cowboy, Deion Sanders, owned one of the night clubs,” Pugh said. “When he found Jesus and wouldn’t go to the club to eat anymore, I went and worked for him at his house for about two years feeding his family and friends.” Pugh would love to expand Alligator Cafe. For the time being, though, he’s happy to work and cook for the eclectic clientele that walks through his doors. “I’ve never worked or been to a restaurant that has such diversity in clientele,” he said. “The food is good, and it’s affordable, plus it’s in a hipster version of the ghetto.”

Alligator Cafe
4416 Live Oak Street
Dallas, TX 75204-6719
(214) 821-6900
www.eatgator.com