

The big easy: Enjoying the Cajun fare at Battiste & Dupree

Several months ago, a reader called asking for a place to get Cajun food in the Cleveland area. He had me stumped, so I started searching. Then, by luck, a food friend told me about a visit to **Battiste & DuPree Cajun Grill** in South Euclid.



Barbara Collier

If you didn't know better you would think you were in New Orleans when you walk into the small, neat restaurant, which is in a strip mall. Walls are jammed with New Orleans Mardi Gras masks and colorful New Orleans posters. Background music is strictly Basin Street blues.

Owner and chef **Junior Battiste** is friendly but concentrates on business — and he knows his business. He grew up in Cleveland but has roots in Louisiana, where he spent time with his grandfather and learned Creole and Cajun cooking.

Battiste decided to go back to New Orleans to learn more about Cajun food, so he attended the Culinary Institute of New Orleans and returned to Cleveland in 2003. Next month, Battiste celebrates his sixth year at his restaurant, but he still returns to New Orleans to attend Mardi Gras and the jazz festival.

Battiste offers a wide variety of Cajun foods. I like his idea of offering many popular Cajun foods in appetizer portions. Of course, he offers Cajun entrees as well. It's all prepared from scratch.

Po' Boys (\$10.50) are what bring many customers through the doors. They are so good. The loaf of French bread is first smeared with Battiste's garlic-basil butter, then piled with a choice of

shrimp, catfish, chicken or crawfish. It's then seasoned with "Bayou Boy Blend" and spread with remoulade, lettuce, tomatoes, onions and American cheese.

My favorite dish is the chicken, sausage and gumbo (\$8.50), which is a dark, spicy soup-like mixture with pieces of chicken and slices of sausage.

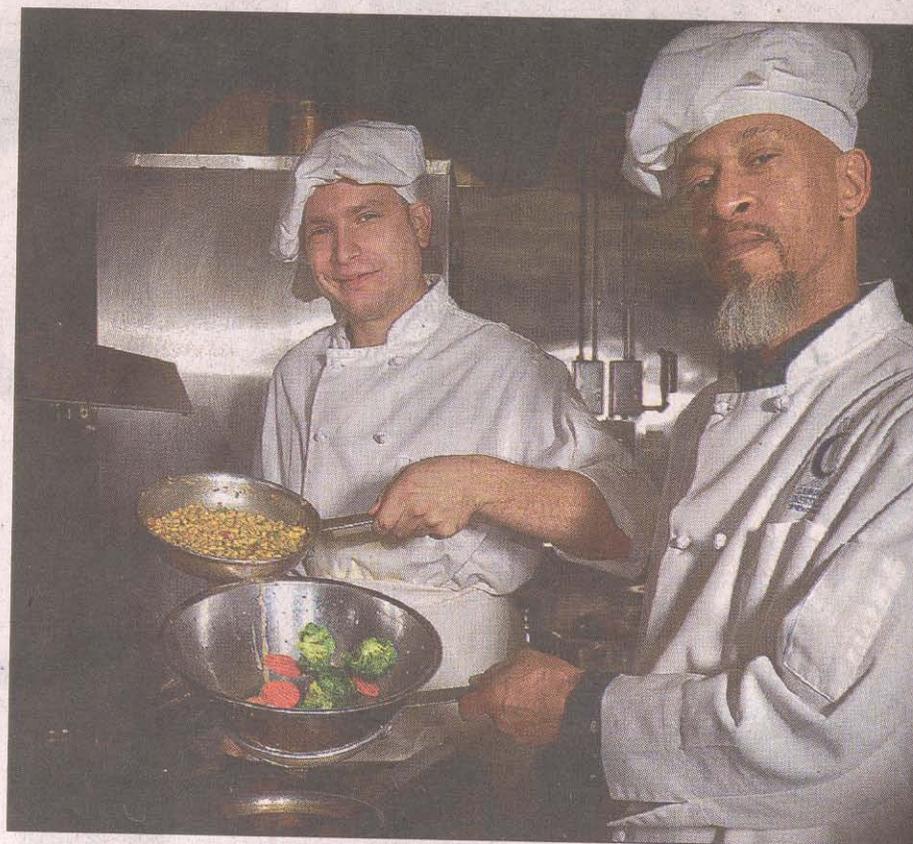
Jambalaya varies from cook to cook. Battiste's jambalaya (\$10.25) is different than any I can recall, but it's tasty and spicy. Lots of rice is mixed with tomato, onion, green peppers and plump shrimp.

We couldn't pass on red beans and rice (\$6.25), which has always been an N'awlins favorite of mine. Although I'd like more juice or sauce with the duo, the dish is tasty and spicy and topped with chopped green onions.

Along with slaw and house salad, Battiste offers his take on Creole potato salad (\$6.25), which is unusual and tasty. He combines diced red-skin potatoes with chopped onion, bell peppers, and diced and toasted Granny Smith apples and garnishes with a green onion mayonnaise and fresh cut strawberries. It's yummy.

It was obvious from observing customers that Battiste's Cajun Buffalo wings (15 for \$10.25) are a hit, especially for carry-out. One customer told me she "almost craves them."

Battiste offers several boxed specials. One is "deluxe fun in box" (\$15), which consists of a Polish boy sandwich, four Buffalo wings, catfish nuggets, fried shrimp and



Junior Battiste, right, and assistant chef Patrick Amato in the kitchen at Battiste & Dupree.

french fries. It's a great meal for the price.

Beginning this month, Battiste is hosting a "Crawfish Boil" with all-you-can-eat crawfish, red-skin potatoes and corn-on-the-cob for \$24.95. The boil is the last Saturday of each month until March. Hours are 1-4 p.m.

Battiste & DuPree is at 1992 Warrensville Center Road in South Euclid. Call (216) 381-3341. Hours are 3-9:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, and 1-11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. The bar is open until 1 a.m. daily.

Contact Collier at BabsReviewsFood@aol.com.

TO MARKET

What: Nantucket Off-Shore meat, poultry and fish rubs.

Details: With varieties like the Nantucket Rub — a blend of dill, tarragon, lemon zest, garlic, and pink peppercorns — and the Dragon Rub — good for Asian dishes — these seasonings are an easy way to add flavor to proteins. They are versatile enough (the company offers 13 different blends) to be used on vegetables, and they contain no salt.

Cost: \$5.79 for 1½ ounces of the Nantucket Rub.

Where: The organic-foods section at Giant Eagle.



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