

Food News

By Su-Jit Lin

Spring is in the air, y'all; time to shake yourself out of the winter doldrums and get active, dine alfresco, and put great food in your belly. Before the mosquitoes invade and the air gets thick with moisture, let's enjoy this respite of fair weather and get inspired to prepare for swimsuit season.

Starting on the lighter side, **Planet Smoothie**, home of "The Best-Tasting Smoothies on the Planet," is making a fruity splash in New Orleans, establishing the first shop in the city at 2116 Magazine Street. With over 35 flavor options, which offer lifestyle enhancements such as Fat Burner, Anti-Oxidant, Anti-Stress, and Immune Blasts (and who doesn't need a boost of *that* during allergy season?), there's something for everyone—so here's to your health!

Now that you're hopped up on vitamin C from that delicious low-calorie smoothie you just downed, how about braving the elements and taking your meal outside for a change? Newcomer **Chill Out Café** on the corner of Maple and Burdette is just a hop away from the universities uptown, and the newly constructed restaurant—complete with a fantastic balcony that still smells sweetly of lumber—is well worth a visit. The owner of popular Japanese eatery **Kyoto** tries something new with fantastic chefs whose traditions and selves hail from Thailand, resulting in juicy Thai dumplings, fabulous fish dishes, and flavorful Pad Thai. Extremely inexpensive, with the majority of the huge entrees costing under \$10, this place is a gem for bargain-hunters and ex-Wall Street bankers. (I kid, I kid.) Oddly enough, Chill Out also serves full breakfasts from open to close if Asian food, like my humor, is not your taste.

Another wallet-friendly option for grabbing bites and catching breezes can be found every day on the Westbank at **Gattuso's Neighborhood Bar and Restaurant**. Kids and pets are welcome on Mondays, with young'uns eating for half-price and pets licking up your scraps for free. Spaghetti and meatballs, that childhood favorite, is 2-for-1 on Tuesdays, and ladies are drinking *gratis* on Wednesdays. Thursdays call for more twofers, but with frozen drinks; Friday's live music helps you unwind for the weekend. Appetizers are half off every day from 4-7 PM, and you can't go wrong with anything that requires Buffalo sauce here. Sweet, tangy, spicy, and unlike anything you've ever had, their huge boneless wings are juicy full-sized tenders. Careful, though—these are so highly addictive, you may forget to order anything else!

Now if you want the experience of eating outdoors without *actually* eating outdoors, **Café Giovanni** has got just the thing for you, with their romantic indoor courtyard dining room. **Chef Duke LoCicero** is bringing brunch back with a vengeance, offering three courses and the experience of listening to live classical opera singers for \$45. And as part of his mission to ensure that we all eat well even in a recession, the chef is also unveiling his **Power Lunch**, which will take place every Friday starting March 6 from noon to 3 PM. For just \$14.95, a soup du jour, salad, and entrée in his signature "New World Italian Cuisine" will be offered to end your week just right.

For weeklong power plays, **Morton's** on the second floor of One Canal Place has got

the answer. From 5-6:30 PM and 9:30-11 PM, Monday through Friday, smart people will be dining at the bar. Why? **Power Hour!** For just \$5 a plate, you can choose from miniature (lump and claw) crab cakes; bite-sized portions of their signature Wedge Salad; a big plate of Chicken Goujonettes; an even bigger platter of lump crab, spinach, and artichoke dip; French fries with decadent melted blue cheese, red peppers, and a sprinkling of chives; four thin-sliced, medium-rare petite filet mignon sandwiches on soft toasted bread; or their best value—three dressed, inch-thick, four-inch wide burgers with melted cheese on fresh rolls.

For more top-shelf eats, **Taste of the Town**—a star-studded non-profit event featuring some of the best restaurateurs in the city—is set for Friday, March 27 at 7 PM. One of the most highly anticipated culinary gatherings of the year, every penny made goes towards two good causes: Lafre-

niere Park, and culinary education in our metro area, an effort partnered with the **Louisiana Restaurant Association**. At just \$90 a ticket for five hours of gourmet gorging, it's a no-brainer. After all, **Tommy Cvitanovich** of **Drago's** said it best: "With how good the donated food is for all the charity events around town, imagine how good it'd be for restaurants' *own* events!"

Also in philanthropy, **Bonefish Grill** in Covington (200 River Highland Blvd.) is also hosting a great special, but their focus is on *le Cocon du Papillion*, a transition complex in St. Tammany for victims of domestic violence who need long-term affordable housing. For one night only, Saturday, February 28 at 6 PM, \$25 will fill you up with their signature appetizers, a main course tasting, complimentary drinks, and a warm feeling in your heart as you reach out in aid of the women and children who have already been through too much.

The Southern Food and Beverage Museum (SoFAB)'s got some tricks to help you bring that warm feeling from your heart and tummy up into your brain, with a Sicilian Cuccidatta demonstration—just in time for St. Joseph's Day and its subsequent celebrations—on March 7 and a cheese-making workshop the following day. Museum admission gets you in for free for Sandra Scalise Juneau's Cuccidatta presentation; a \$15/\$20 members/non-members fee will get you in some deep cheese March 8.

And with that, I'm signing out this month and letting spring fever take me over before the summer heat, moisture, and insects set in. Catch me at any of the above places (I'm counting my dollars, too!), and enjoy what March brings to the dinner table. Remember, a poor economic climate means better deals for eating out, so head out and experience this price-busting in action. *Bon appetit.*

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