



In the Chef's Corner

Savannah's Restaurant



BY MATTHEW
PARKINS

BORN AND RAISED in Huntington, West Virginia, I was the ripe age of 10 when I moved to Pennsylvania first and then Ohio with my family before returning to the Mountain State. At a young age, I had a beautiful daughter, Haley Marie, and dropped out of high school. I immediately pursued my GED and began work in the culinary field, a choice that has led me to where I am today.

My first job in the food industry was at the local country club as a line cook. I remember the first week I worked there, the chef, who was a down-home country cook, pulled me aside and said, "Son, you really have a future in this field. You should stick with it. Just try to move every couple of years to get as much experience and knowledge as you can." So that is what I've done.

I moved to Pittsburgh in the early 90s where I began working in an upscale café while I attended the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. After realizing this school was not the path for me, I returned to West Virginia and the country club again, but this time I worked under a new chef. He taught me how to just make things work and how to handle the constant stresses of a high-volume restaurant.

I then decided to return to Pittsburgh and attend the Pennsylvania Institute of Culinary Arts while working in a variety of different food service establishments and doing just as my first chef had told me to do—gaining as much experience as possible.

I eventually settled down with a chef named Dan Crocker in a hospital management company. He showed me how to manage, multi-task and, above all, how to treat each customer as your only customer. Individual attention to detail, time management and culinary knowledge became my achievements. I was promoted to head chef of the culinary program for the hospital management company and handled all of the upscale dinners for executives, doctors and functions.

In 2002, I returned to Huntington to be near my daughter and began looking for work. I worked a couple of different jobs before finding Savannah's, but since 2002, it's been my home away from home. Savannah's has given me the opportunity to showcase my skills as well as become a part of an independent restaurant family. My bosses and many co-workers are all people I consider my lifelong friends and family.

Photography by Tracy Toler

ExEdge

Saffron, made from the dried stamens of cultivated crocus flowers, is the most expensive cooking spice.

Source: <http://www.funfacts.com.au/interesting-food-facts/>



The bar at Savannah's Restaurant.

Savannah's Famous Crab Cakes

Yields 12 Cakes

- 1 can of Phillips® Jumbo Crab Meat
- 1 shallot, minced
- 1 jalapeño pepper, minced
- 2 scallions, finely sliced
- 1 red pepper, fire-roasted, peeled and minced
- 1 egg
- 3 tbsp. mayonnaise
- ¾ lbs. Russet potato
- ¾ cup stale bread crumbs
- salt and pepper to taste

Preheat the oven to 375° and bake the potato for 20-30 minutes or until just starting to give to the touch. You want your potato to be firm but not raw. Remove and cool to room temperature.

Combine shallots, jalapeño, scallions, red pepper, egg and mayonnaise in a bowl large enough to fit all ingredients in the recipe and mix well. Add stale breadcrumbs. If you do not have stale bread, you can toast a few pieces of white bread at 300° in your oven until dry and pulse in a processor.

Peel your cooled potato and shred on a box shredder. Combine with mixture and mix well. Add your canned crabmeat, salt and pepper. Fold with a rubber spatula until combined, careful not to break up the crabmeat the best you can (some will fall apart and that's okay).

Form into cakes by hand. (Usually using a ping-pong sized ball portion of the mixture to form into a cake works well.) Place on parchment paper and refrigerate until ready to cook.



To cook your crab cakes, you need to keep two things in mind: one, do not overcrowd your pan or the crab cakes will not brown but will fall apart because they are so fragile; and two, the moisture in the cakes tends to splatter in the oil so be very careful. With that said, heat a 10" skillet on medium-high with enough olive oil to completely cover the bottom until it just begins to smoke. Add your crab cakes in batches of four at a time and cook until you see the edges begin to brown. The cakes are very fragile and again the oil is very dangerous, so the technique I use to flip them is to place a thin metal spatula underneath the cake and gently tilt the skillet so the oil is away from the cake I'm about to flip. I flip it away from the oil so that it lands in a minimal amount of oil. This way, you have less chance of splashing yourself.

Cook for another 1½ minutes and transfer to a warmed platter. Continue until all cakes are cooked.

Serve with your favorite sauce.

Savannah's BLT Salad

- 1 head of iceberg lettuce
- 1 recipe of Point Reyes Blue Cheese Dressing
- ½ lb. pancetta or bacon dried
- 24 cherry tomatoes, quartered

First, preheat your oven to 300°. Dice the pancetta or bacon and place in oven-safe skillet or sheet pan and bake until fat has rendered and becomes crisp. Strain fat from pancetta and place on a paper towel. Core iceberg lettuce, wash and drain until dry. With core side down, cut in half, place cut side down and cut each half again. Place outer layer side down as in a wedge and cut each wedge into a smaller wedge.

Place each wedge on plates and top with two ounces of dressing, three quartered cherry tomatoes and cooked pancetta. Serve immediately and top with fresh ground pepper.

Point Reyes Blue Cheese Dressing

- 2 cups prepared mayonnaise
- 1 cup sour cream
- 2 dashes tabasco sauce
- 1 tsp. worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp. fresh ground black pepper
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- ½ pound crumbled Point Reyes Blue Cheese
- ¼ cup milk
- 1 lemon, juiced

Combine all ingredients in a mixing bowl and mix well with a rubber spatula until well incorporated. It's best to make this a few hours ahead or even a day ahead and refrigerate so the flavors can develop.



Chicken Cordon Bleu

Yields 4 Main Course Servings

- 4 6 oz. chicken breasts, boneless and skinless
- 4 oz. softened cream cheese
- 4 oz. Point Reyes Blue Cheese
- 4 thin slices of pancetta or prosciutto from the deli
- 2 eggs
- ¼ cup half and half
- 1 cup stale breadcrumbs
- 2 tsp. kosher salt



Combine cream cheese and blue cheese in a bowl and mix well; set aside for later use. Beat eggs and half and half in a bowl with a fork until combined and set aside. Combine breadcrumbs and salt, mix and set aside.

Take one chicken breast and place on cutting board. Cover with plastic wrap and pound with mallet until almost one and a half times its original size.

Remove plastic wrap. Place a slice of pancetta on top of a portion of chicken and two ounces of the cheese mixture in the center. Wrap chicken in a ball around cheese. Continue with remaining chicken.

Pre-heat your oven to 350°. Heat oven-safe 10" skillet on medium high heat with enough olive oil to cover bottom until just before smoking point.

One at a time, add chicken to egg mixture, drain excess and then add to breadcrumbs and coat. Continue until all chicken breasts are breaded. Place in skillet and brown all sides. Finish in oven, turning every two minutes until you reach an internal temperature of 160° on an instant read thermometer. Rest for five minutes and serve with your favorite sauce. ■