





# BBQ ALA GOOD TIMES

— AT THE —

# BLUES CITY CAFE

BY RILEY MANNING

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RORY DOYLE

The Blues City Cafe sits at the top of Beale Street like a guardian of the good times.

Seated on the corner, local boys flip endlessly down the road while the cops watch on. Plenty of neon eateries line the cobbled road, but the cafe is the real deal.

It first opened its doors as “Doe’s Eat Place” in 1991, and it was the second branch of a Greenville, Mississippi, restaurant. At the time, it took up only a third of the space it does now.

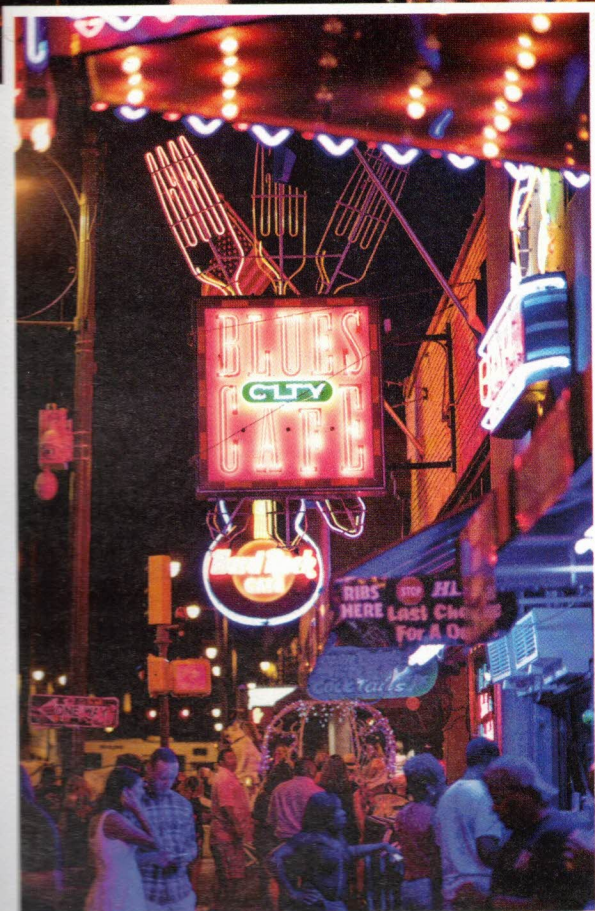
“At first it was a steak joint,” said general manager Jeff “Goose” Goss. “The chef back then, Chef Bonnie Mack, was always into steak. But one night, they featured ribs, and almost overnight, it became a ribs place.”

Though it still serves steaks, the popular downtown Memphis cafe is a ribs place through and through. After a while, it became a catfish place, too. Mack hung in there as investors bought Doe’s in ‘93 and changed the name to Blues City Cafe. In a lot of ways,





Blues City Cafe on Beale Street in Memphis is jamming most nights of the week until the wee hours of the morning. Begun as a steak place, the Cafe is now famous for its fall-off-the-bone rib meat, great music and cool atmosphere.



it's still the house Bonnie Mack built, though he passed in 2006.

"This place stays open until 3 a.m. during the week, and until 5 a.m. on the weekends," said Richard Magevney, who handles public relations for Blues City. "We put out about 2,500 slabs of ribs on a given week, and the reason we have that demand is because we are consistently good. A lot of that is because of Bonnie Mack's leadership."

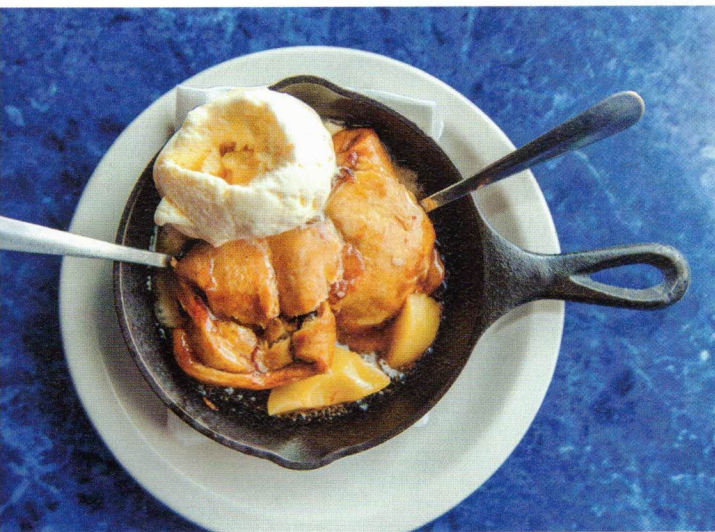
Mack's successor is a young cat in his early 30s, chef Larry Crawford. Crawford started as a dishwasher about 15 years ago, but by 2004, he had garnered a reputation as one of the best steak cooks in Memphis.

"My step dad used to work in the kitchen, so he got me in the door," Crawford said. "One night, they were busy on the line, so I came out of the dish room to help. After that, they never let me touch another dish."

Now he helms the kitchen for 60 hours each week, and there's nowhere he'd rather be.

"It's fun. Every day is different," Crawford said. "Mack's recipe was handed to me on a silver platter, but they still let me try new things. I made some strawberry cobbler and have been working on a barbecue lasagna. They're pretty good, so you might be seeing those on the menu soon."





Crawford's ribs aren't made for the world of competition barbecue. The tender meat falls off the bone so easily, it'll make you wonder how they arrived intact in the first place. The catfish is sourced out of Yazoo City, Mississippi, breaded to crispy perfection.

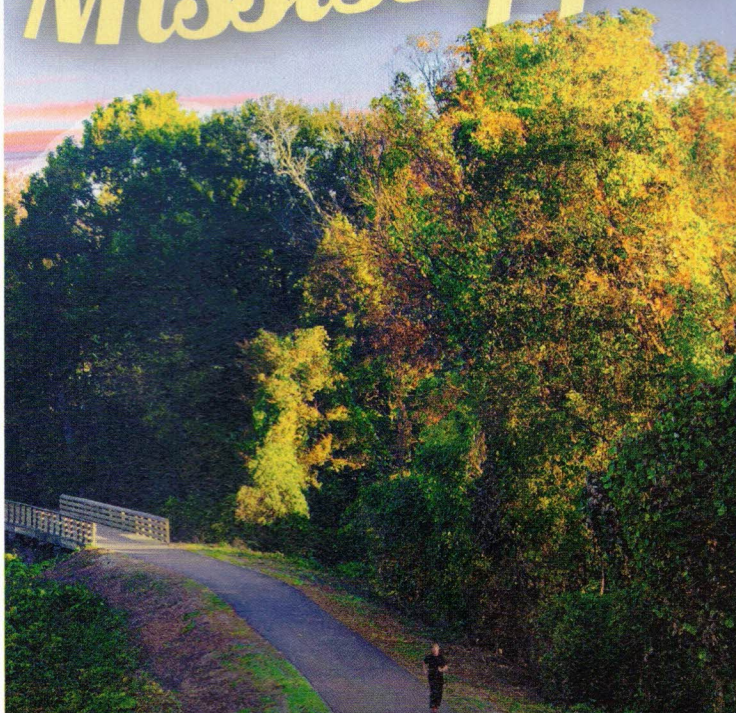
"We limit the cooks in the kitchen," Crawford said. "From start to finish, only three people touch the ribs. And we do it the same every time."

In the early '90s, the owners bought the adjacent address on Beale Street to incorporate Blues City Cafe's band box. The former bar was transformed into extra dining space – the Cadillac Room, where a pink, sawed-in-half Caddy juts from the wall. Nowhere else do musicians, celebrities, locals, and visitors feel quite so at home.

"Historically, Beale Street is a place to have a good time. Back in the day you had the brothels and the gambling, a little bit of everything," Magevney said. "We embrace that. It's not uncommon for Blues City Cafe to be completely full at 6:30 on a Sunday morning with late-nighters eating catfish and ribs."

Around town, the place is a favorite of locals, like police officers, as well as the celebrities of Memphis – athletes and musicians.

# Visit a Special place in Mississippi!



## YOU'LL FIND SOMETHING SPECIAL IN NEW ALBANY

Over a dozen quality antique shops, a thriving downtown with myriad independent quality retailers, a 44-mile bike trail and award-winning recreational facilities, friendly people and a short, hassle-free drive from Memphis & Oxford make New Albany your charming go-to town when you need a change of scenery.

Come see us!

# NEW ALBANY

MISSISSIPPI

WWW.VISITNEWALBANY.COM





"When the Grizzlies were playing Golden State in the NBA basketball tournament, Golden State lost a game. Steph Curry was bummed out, but his teammates brought him here," Magevney said. "The next night, Curry had his game back, and when they got to the finals the running joke was, 'Does Blues City Cafe deliver?' It was the catfish. Definitely the catfish."

Then there's the story of Katy Perry's bus pulling up to the back part of the restaurant – known as George Paul's Last Call – to pick up their call in order.

The rush never stops at the cafe. If it isn't Elvis Week, it's one music festival or another. Innumerable acts have taken the stage, from the Neville Brothers to Courtney Love to Albert King's last gig.

"I can't tell you how many times a band has come in to eat, and they end up jumping up on stage and joining in," Goss said. "It speaks to the vibe here. People are comfortable."

Picture frames line the wall of the dining room and the band box. Signs and banners proclaim "Steak so good, it'll make a train take a dirt road." Magevney said whenever the staff has to take down the wall decorations for paint or repair they're careful to hang them up exactly as they were, as a superstition. It doesn't take much more than a look around to know there's some sort of voodoo at work. Maybe in the rib sauce.

For Crawford, being caught up in the middle of it feels like nothing short of home.

"We're a family here, and when you eat here, you're our family, too," he said. "It's always rockin' and rollin'."

**T**

## WANT TO GO?

Located at 138 Beale St., Memphis, find more information at [bluescitycafe.com](http://bluescitycafe.com), including a full menu and music lineup. A few of our faves include the sausage and cheese platter, gumbo cheese fries, the "World's Best Tamales," Larry's "Down South" turnip greens, a full rack of ribs with all the trimmings and apple dumpling with ice cream.