

## LET'S Eat OUT!

# Taste of Louisiana Café has varied, tasty menu items

By Helen Wale Turner

Amber Hampton graduated from college with a degree in political science with the intention of becoming a lawyer. She decided to take some time off first, and during that time, she got the idea of opening a café.

"I saw my mom working so hard at another restaurant," Amber explained, "and I told her that if she was going to work that hard, she might as well be working for herself."

They put their heads together and the result was the Taste of Louisiana Café that opened in 2003 in the flea market on Range Ave. at I-12 in Denham Springs. When the flea market closed in 2006, they moved into the building at 105 N. Range Ave., two doors up from Railroad Ave. in the Antiques Village.

"Our entrance is recessed a little," Amber said, "so you might not notice us at first, but it's a great location, and we enjoy being here with all the shops."

Amber manages the front of the restaurant, handles the bookkeeping and helps their two waitresses, while her fiancé, Cary Dugas, and her mother, Kim Hampton, do the cooking.

"They get along great," said Hampton, "and they work together 10 to 12 hours a day. I help them sometimes if it gets really busy, but most of the time it's just the two of them. They're the reason we're able to keep the quality of our food so high; when the same two people are always preparing the dishes, you know the food will be cooked the same way each time. Plus, my mom buys the produce fresh each day, and she won't buy anything but the best."

The downtown antiques shops traditionally close around 5 p.m., but Hampton keeps the café open until 9 p.m., and they do a brisk take-out supper business. Many of the stores are staying open later on Thursdays during the Christmas season, so if you go out to shop in the Antiques Village on Thursday evenings, cap off your evening at the Taste of Louisiana with their huge hamburger, a bowl of soup or one of their many seafood dishes.

The café is relatively small with about 13 tables, but they have a full-fledged menu that includes appetizers, hamburgers and po-boys, soups, salads and a wide variety of entrees. You'll find fried eggplant and shrimp, the best-selling Crawfish Etouffee, and their newest dish, Crawfish Moulon, which is homemade crawfish cornbread dressing topped with crawfish etouffee. This used to be a dish they offered occasionally, but customers demanded they add it to the regular menu. Another favorite is Eggplant Josephine - fried eggplant medallions topped with creamy seafood au gratin.

They offer several interesting variations on the hamburger, such as the new Bleu Surf and Turf Burger that's topped with fried shrimp and bleu



Taste of Louisiana Cafe is located in the heart of the Denham Springs Antiques Village.

Amber Hampton of Taste of Louisiana Café shows their newest dish, Crawfish Moulon, that is fast becoming a big hit with customers.

cheese crumbles. All burgers are 1/2 pound of lean meat and are served with your choice of French fries or fried okra.

The po-boys aren't scrimped on either; they're made from an old-fashioned pot roast Kim cooks.

The menu warns that the po-boy is "a mess worth making; you'll definitely need a few napkins and maybe even a knife and fork." Seafood po-boys are

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