

FEASTING AND FROLICKING

Northern Louisiana seasonal dinner series celebrates farm-to-table ingredients and heritage cooking techniques

BY *Jyl Benson*
PHOTOS BY *Romero & Romero*



Sweet tea, barbecue chicken with smoked sausage and cornbread



Collard greens, baked sweet potato, hot-water cornbread and a tomato, cucumber and onion salad

ON A LATE JANUARY DAY, with sparkling skies over Princeton just outside of Bossier City, a soft, though persistent breeze bathed 75 assembled guests at Mahaffey Family Farms with the mouth-watering aromas of spicy hand-tied tamales, roasting pork, buttery cornbread and lushly smothered greens and black-eyed peas — both rich with hunks of smoked ham.

It was the fourth in the year-old Seasons & Traditions dinner series, a collaborative farm-to-table affair produced by Evan McCommon of Mahaffey Farms and Chef Hargette Harris, creator of the Official Meal of North Louisiana and the “Us Up North” tour and culinary experience. The featured guest chef for the “Feast and Frolic,” dinner was Dr. Howard Conyers, a celebrated South Carolina-

GOOD BETS

Located on a gracious stretch of Shreveport’s Fairfield Avenue close to dining, shops and entertainment venues, 2439 Fairfield serves as a charmingly appointed bed and breakfast as well as a reservations-only brunch restaurant. It is a welcoming place for those not wanting to stay in one of the area’s many casino hotels.

Proprietor Jimmy Harris lovingly restored the Victorian mansion in 1988 and has spent the years since investing lavishly in period antiques and adornments. Each of the four guestrooms has access to a balcony outfitted with rocking chairs overlooking the gardens. As a host Jimmy is warm, welcoming and eager to please.

Breakfast, or brunch if you’d rather, is a lavish affair replete with homemade breads and jams, fresh fruit, a variety of egg dishes, creamy grits, hash brown casseroles and homemade fried hand pies served piping hot. Every sumptuous dish Harris deftly prepares with skill and pride was learned at the knees of his ancestors. He will regale with tales and memories of each of them and graciously shares their recipes.

style, whole hog barbecue pit master, who cooked on-site a Red Wattle hog raised at Mahaffey Farms using generations-old techniques he learned as a child growing up in rural Paxville, South Carolina. Conyers educated the assemblage on the history and cultural significance of traditional pit barbecue as it has been passed down to him through generations beginning with his West African ancestors who were brought to South Carolina as slaves. By day, the New Orleans resident works as a scientist testing rocket engines at NASA’s Stennis Space Center but his passion is for the culinary art he learned as a child and works ardently to preserve through Carolina NOLA, his New Orleans-based barbecue pop-up.

The sold-out event included a bounty of seasonal side dishes prepared by Harris, tamales from Emerson Tamales, an open bar with craft beer, specialty cocktails, and live music. The event attracted a diverse group of enthusiasts of all ages.

Mahaffey Farms is run by a small, multi-generational family growing nutrient-dense foods such as pasture-raised meats, eggs and naturally grown vegetables and herbs. The farmhouse is also available for rent on Airbnb.

Through the Seasons & Traditions series, Harris and McCommon work to build community while educating people about the foods they eat and where they come from, as well as preserve the culinary traditions specific to Northern Louisiana.

“We are about the authenticity of our north Louisiana food,” Harris says. “These foods are commonly found on a soul-food menu and we celebrate them with the idea that if ‘you don’t think you’re pretty, no one else will either.’”

The next Seasons & Traditions dinner will be held on May 28 at Mahaffey Farms. For more information on the Seasons & Traditions dinner series visit the Facebook page. ■

A BED & BREAKFAST

2439 Fairfield Ave., Shreveport. 318-424-2424

CHEF HARDETTE HARRIS, US UP NORTH

282-701-7432. foodtourlouisiana.com.

MAHAFFEY FAMILY FARMS

440 Mahaffey Road, Princeton. 318-949-6249. mahaffeyfarms.com.

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