

Soul food newcomer arrives in Temple Hills

Carey's Cuisine's soul food, large portions, attracts national attention

Crystal Carey has come a long way since the days of cooking and selling chicken, macaroni and cheese and collard greens out of her college dorm room at Saint Peter's College in Jersey City, N.J.

As a student on a basketball scholarship, Carey needed spending cash, and NCAA rules prohibited scholarship players from working. Carey saw a market – her hungry classmates – and offered her delectable soul food a couple nights a week.

A decade later, Carey's clientele has expanded, and she still has loyal customers asking for her cooking.

A year after opening Carey's Cuisine on St. Barnabas Road in Temple Hills, Carey's fried chicken wingettes (\$9), southern fried chicken (\$7), glazed turkey ham and a host of other menu offerings were recognized in a national contest, where Carey, 32, was named a finalist.



Carey's Cuisine was recognized as one of the best soul food restaurants in the country at the Sixth Annual Hoodie Awards in Las Vegas, hosted by comedian and radio host Steve Harvey.

"It really means a lot to me," said Carey, who lives in Upper Marlboro. "Especially being someone new on the scene. Everything is a new avenue for me right now, and this helps."

Carey's breakfast menu is filled with a variety of omelets, which, according to customers, will cure anyone's morning hunger pains.

"It's off the chain," said frequent Carey's Cuisine customer Robert Polk of Capitol Heights. "It really has been perfect."

Polk and his friend, Washington, D.C., resident Frederick Gaskins, couldn't wait for their next breakfast at Carey's, which includes cheese omelets (\$4), sausage omelets (\$5), Philly cheese steak omelets (\$5) and supreme omelets (\$5.25), complete with mushrooms, sausage, onions, green peppers and bacon.

Other breakfast meals are the homemade buttermilk pancakes (\$3.50-\$4.25) and the Sweets French Toast (\$3.75-\$4.25). Side orders – all homemade – include corn bread (90 cents), honey wheat roll (\$1), garlic mashed potatoes with cheese (\$3), stuffing (\$3) and creamed spinach (\$3).

Carey, a teacher in the Anne Arundel County school system, said the key to good soul food was simple: No canned greens or potatoes and a flavorful batter that separates her chicken from competitor's offerings.

"It gives it that flavor," Carey said, crediting her restaurateur grandfather for his soul food pearls of wisdom. "It's all about paying attention to details."

Carey's repertoire isn't limited to soul food. She makes wedding cakes too after taking an intensive class to learn the tricks of icing trade. The cakes have been in such demand, she said, that pulling all-nighters to finish a wedding masterpiece has become commonplace.

Customers said Carey is responsive to local demand. Gaskins, a restaurant regular, said he was thrilled to see Carey add a fish platter (\$6.95) to the menu after he suggested the addition.

"It's big enough for two people, I swear," Gaskins said.

Hefty portions, Carey said, have kept customers coming back, just like they did during her college years.

"We would never offer customers anything less," she said.

Carey's Cuisine

4311 Saint Barnabas Road, Temple Hills

Phone: 301-899-3887

Hours: Sunday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Saturday, 6 p.m. to midnight