Laura’s II serves up family-friendly fixin’s, hospitality

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After serving notorious Creole-style plate lunches for over 17 years, one of Lafayette’s most valued homegrown restaurants, Laura’s II, was finally awarded a food ambassador recognition from Lafayette city-parish government.

“I think that award came at a good time for us,” said Madonna Broussard, head cook and owner of Laura’s II. “Because not only are we trying to promote ourselves, but we are really trying to promote this wonderful city. There’s great schools here, good people. It’s just a really cool city with good things to come to. So that really helped us and made us feel really good, because along with what we’re doing here, we just want to let people know Lafayette is a wonderful place.”

Laura’s II is a quintessential family-owned facility, with its “Lafayette love jargon” escalating the mouths of the employees, and its nobody-else-is-a-stranger southern vibe, it’s almost as if this restaurant has captured the same comfort as dining at one’s grandparents home.

“We’ve known some of the same people for a long time,” Broussard said. “And that includes all races; we’ve known the same customers — whites, blacks, Asians — for years. I’ll go to a doctor’s office and I’ll hear stories from some of them saying they came here as college kids. We have the same base of clientele, with the same friendly funky atmosphere. We try; that has been our motto. I try to get all my workers to understand that. We kind of have that jargon of ‘boo and baby,’ you know, that Lafayette love.”

The bricked building stands on 1904 W. University Ave., with a space black window that reads “Laura’s II” in gold paint, with “Mon-Sun. 10:30-2:30” painted below it in vermilion red and gold below. The bronze door leading to the main entrance opens to reveal a painted brick wall, and across from it stands the counter for ordering.

Warm eggshell-and-cremie painted walls and a brick wall enclose the main seating area with 10 tables and four booths covering the floor for guests who wish to dine in. The smell of the ambrosial turkey wings, chicken and pork chops seems to swirl around the room intoxicating the nostrils and enticing the customers’ taste buds.

Although the side dishes typically vary day to day, each plate lunch starts with the same thing: rice and the Broussard family’s signature gravy.

“Our plates don’t start without rice and gravy,” Broussard said. “That’s who we are. We are rice and gravy. If you want something here, it has to start with rice and gravy, and that’s how we start every morning. Every morning we start off with roux, water and seasonings. So I tell everybody, every morning, we have a science project and we start putting in our work and we make gravy every morning. It’s from our own hands.”

Although Laura’s II has been around since 2000, they have been persistent with adjustments in technology advancements in order to increase advertising, whether that’s through social media or Waitr, a food delivery service. In the midst of all these advancements, however, Broussard has also continued to accommodate to customers of all ages, never putting them on the back burner.

“Our Saturdays are more of a younger crowd — thank you boo,” Broussard said as she cut off her sentence to thank a customer. “We accommodate to all our customers, you know; we just make it homey. Our older crowd isn’t big on Waitr or anything so depending on the age group that day we will adjust the music or just keep it quiet so customers can relax more.”

While keeping up with the latest trends, Broussard also included her desire to stick with tradition when it comes to the Lenten season.

“We are gearing up for our biggest season which is Lent,” Broussard said. “Every Lenten season is kind of like the plate lunch Olympics. We serve basically all seafood. From my grandparents to now, I’ve watched it change. Like on Ash Wednesday, we found that now there’s some people that come in here — usually our younger based customers — and they’re like ‘what is that?’ ‘people still do that?’ but on Ash Wednesday we don’t serve any of our meat items. We are still holding on to that tradition of not eating meat on Wednesday and Friday.”

Broussard’s expertise and appreciation on all things kitchen and family based is something she credits to her grandmother, Laura Broussard.

The Laura’s legacy first started in 1968 in Laura Broussard’s home. The house on a backstreet in Northside Lafayette was where she began serving her famous plate lunches covered in her specialty gravy. Laura’s home burned down a few years after, resulting in what was thought to be the end of the first plate lunch home in Lafayette. The Broussard girls, however, had other plans — so it was all gravy.

“After my grandmother’s house burned down, she set up everything in this little metal building,” Broussard said. “Which was kind of like a little food shack. People piled up in there and in 2000 we moved here. We’ve made a few little changes and we try to keep up with the times because we have younger people. But eating here is basically like eating in your living room at home.”

According to Lacey Broussard, the daughter of Madonna Broussard, their goal at Laura’s II goes further than just feeding customers their delectable plate lunches, but feeding their souls is just as important.

“Our role in the community is more than just feeding people,” Lacey Broussard said. “My mom does a lot of charity work but what I love about her is that she doesn’t do it for the publicity. She is Laura. She is doing what Laura would have done. If you didn’t have any money and you were hungry, Laura would feed you. And that’s the same way my mom is.”

Just as Broussard took the reins from her grandmother, Lacey Broussard, 30, has aspirations to do the same.

“The business has impacted me in a very big way,” Lacey Broussard said. “As a kid and in high school, I never thought that I’d be here in Lafayette serving plate lunches. But as I got older, I just never left. I stayed and I have my mom’s back. There’s nothing else I can see myself doing, its fun for me.”

With a fresh ambassadorship sitting upon the restaurant like an angelic halo and an endless amount of fanatic clientele, Laura’s II is and will always be a staple of the city of Lafayette.

“I think I’ve done well,” Broussard said. “I think my grandmother would be proud. We have made slight changes to the menu and how we do things. I think that as family based as we are, it taught us that we’re all based to this business and this industry and we all represent my grandmother. Even if we’re distant or in-laws, everyone still wears that ‘Laura’s’ on their chest. We are all one unit, we don’t all work here but we all represent it really well.”