PJ's Grill: A community restaurant

by Amanda L. Guidry

PJ's Grill on North Parkerson Avenue in Crowley isn't obtrusive. It's a square-shaped building set at a slight angle and lined with windows on two of its four outer walls. But what strikes drivers as they pass this building is the feeling of community. PJ's is known for its community spirit, from painting windows during the homecoming weeks of Crowley High and Notre Dame High to supporting Little League teams to honoring local military personnel on its large sign. And this spirit is what owner Peter Boulet says is key to his successful business.

"I grew up in the food industry," said Peter, a 42-year-old Crowley native. "My dad had a bunch of Sonics, and my older brother and I had a Luther's in Little Rock. I worked at Burger Time in Lafayette. I always knew this was something I wanted to do."

"When I was in Little Rock, I married a girl from Lafayette—Lorraine," explained Peter. "After a year there, we wanted to come home. Time passed, and the duo had son Peter John (P.J.), after whom the restaurant was named. In the next few years, they were blessed with daughters Jessica, Grace and Erin."

But what inspired the restaurateur to open the grill?

"With my Sonic and Burger Time background, I wanted to have a fast-food restaurant with a little bit of a Cajun flair. It started out as a hamburger restaurant, and I brought in the Cajun items, like fried catfish."

The menu at PJ's Grill is extensive, ranging from breakfast morsels of beignets, biscuits and French toast to lunch and dinner items like hamburgers, fries, chicken strips, fried catfish, chicken sandwiches, muffalatas and seafood-filled baked potatoes. And during crawfish season, Peter also offers boiled crawfish.

"My menu is probably too big for a fast-food restaurant," he admitted, smiling a self-deprecating grin. "I came up with most of the recipes; some I've gotten from my mom. Some products are not really recipes; I get them already prepared. I work really closely with the company I buy my supplies from. My brother-in-law actually works there and is a great contact."

"I use Cajun Blast seasoning, which is my brothers Ryan and Brian's company," said Peter. "One of my other brothers is a crawfish farmer, and I..."
haven't been able to get his crawfish for the restaurant because he's booked, but I get mine from his friend."

Having such a large family means gatherings are momentous occasions, but they are special to Peter. So special that PJ's is closed on all major holidays except for Independence Day.

"I get a lot of comments because we close every holiday," said Peter, smiling as he described his friends' reactions to the "money loss." "We have big family gatherings, and if I've got to open up on those days, then I need to do something else. And my workers really appreciate that."

His staff's loyalty is obvious in many of their work records, like Yvette Savoy and Marilyn Green who have worked for Peter 14 and 13 years respectively.

"Consistency is probably the most important thing in my business," said Peter. "I want people to come in and have a really good hamburger, and then come in again and have another really good hamburger. It's important that the burger is dressed the same way every time.

"We try to serve the best we can and the best food we can. And so far, knock on wood, thank the Lord, we've been successful. I always try to give back to the community. This has become a community place. 'Good food, good service, giving back to the community' is the core of our business.

"And it's so important to support your local business people," he continued. "Give back to the community. These local businesses really depend on you. It's a pleasure to serve this community and, hopefully, when people come here, they feel like they own a little bit of it."

PJ's Grill in Crowley is located at 2306 N. Parkerson Ave. Owner Peter Boulet said the restaurant serves fast-food with a Cajun flair.

(BNP/Amanda L. Guidry Photo)