

EATER'S DIGEST

Soul Kitchen

LL DENT BRINGS THE SOUTH TO NASSAU

BY RON BEIGEL

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Long Islanders can satisfy their craving for soul food at the newly opened LL Dent in Carle Place.



Long Island has been without an upscale soul food establishment since Cornbread and Caviar made a brief run at it in Baldwin almost 10 years ago. That's changed thanks to LL Dent, perfectly located across from Roosevelt Field in Carle Place, where the mother-daughter team of Lillian and Leisa Dent describe what comes out of Leisa's kitchen as "American cuisine with a Southern flair."

There's also a great Long Island legend here: Leisa was friends with Eddie Murphy when they were kids growing up in Roosevelt, and later became his personal chef at his homes in Englewood, NJ and Hollywood.

My first visit to the café that used to house Radici (the long, high counter still remains), I made a lunch out of starters and sides—Crispy Fried Chicken Livers (\$4.95), Baked Macaroni and Cheese (\$3) and a cup of Toby's Georgia Hash (\$2.95). Further filling me beyond capacity was a mini loaf of warm corn bread. A buck fifty brings a bottomless glass of Sweet Iced Tea.

Every plate brought a new delight. Leisa's "Southern flair" elevated each traditional dish to a higher level. The hash was sort of a cross between bean-less chili and Brunswick stew. Made with ground pork and beef with stewed tomato, it seemed to have been almost pureed and covered with yellow rice, just enough for mixing in. Don't let the word "spicy" in the menu description throw you off—it had almost none. I couldn't stop spooning it into my mouth.

The same went for the LL Spicy Chicken Soup (\$2.95/\$4.95), but this thick, gumbo-like concoction of shredded chicken, okra, rice and vegetables had a nice undercurrent of heat. Leisa's battered and deep-fried livers,

crunchy on the outside and tender within, were enough for a nice lunch on their own. The mac and cheese proved utterly addictive, too, standing cake-like on a plate.

The dinner menu is mostly the same as the lunch menu, but sandwiches become platters. The Pulled Pork (\$11.95) was shredded meat, slow-roasted in cider vinegar, reminding me of the Cuban dish Ropa Vieja. It was impossible to tear myself away from it and the candied yams that came with it were equally transcendent. I have to also give praise to the perfectly turned out Cole Slaw, just creamy enough and not overseasoned. Southern Fried Catfish (\$13.95) was very straightforward. Perfectly crunchy and thin, you can get tartar sauce or hot sauce to make it more interesting. BBQ Brisket of Beef (\$12.95), slow-roasted like the pork, was another deeply soulful satisfier. Mustardy and mushy Potato Salad was a good side. Southern Fried Chicken (\$12.95) was OK, but not as special as you would expect, and the single leg and thigh was just not enough.

For dessert, a good-sized individual Sweet Potato Pie (\$3.50) was reason to celebrate and it could've easily fed two, especially after consuming the nice portions at lunch or dinner. Crunch Pound Cake (\$3.25) was very sweet, with a lemony flavor.

I asked for a doggy bag and the waiter asked if I wanted to take home the remainder of the complimentary corn bread. When he brought the bag back he told me he put a whole new loaf in. Along with Lillian greeting everyone with her warm smile, I knew what Southern hospitality was all about. ●

LL Dent

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