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GUMBO WITH ANDOUILLE SAUSAGE, CHICKEN, TRINITY, OKRA, SHRIMP AND RICE. Photo by Eve Weston

Styr It Up

After three years as a food truck, Styr Kurbside Kitchen brings comfort food for Springfield

BY HENRY HOUSTON

It's 9 am on a Sunday when I walk into Styr Kurbside Kitchen. Music is blaring and NFL pregame shows are on the TV while owner Cam Stansberry is preparing food in the back for the day. It's no accident that this all comes together to create a homey feel — it's how Stansberry recalls his home growing up.

"Anytime you walked into the house or I brought friends over, the music was blaring and something was cooking in the kitchen," he says.

Making people feel at home with comfort

food is what Stansberry does at Styr. Styr opened as a food cart in 2021 and recently found a brick and mortar location in Springfield, where it has a menu that includes fried chicken and waffles, mac and cheese, gumbo, Italian beef sandwiches — the sort of meals that can make you forget about any problems going on in the world (for a moment).

Since he was about 14, Stansberry says he's worked in restaurants, starting as most do: washing dishes. But his love for cooking began when he was just old enough to reach the stove and stir the pot.

The Eugene-born restaurateur cites his mom as his culinary inspiration and Styr Kurbside Kitchen's menu as the sort of food that he grew up eating over the holidays and get-togethers.

After about 15 years of working in restaurants around town, Stansberry decided to open his food cart in 2021 on a whim. And it didn't take long to develop a loyal following that led to finding a brick and mortar location.

"Because our menu was catfish, chicken,

shrimp, waffles, fries, we would run as a special one of our soul food sides, and people started getting frustrated that we didn't have their favorite side," he says. "And that was kind of one of the first indicators to be like, we have to do something bigger."

Catfish was the breakout dish for Styr, Stansberry says. It was the menu item that brought in people from the South, some of the African American community, and even University of Oregon Duck football players. And it was what solidified the idea of sticking with the soul food idea.

But for people in the Pacific Northwest who may have iffy feelings about catfish, he assures them, "Let me cook it for you." Of course, Stansberry won't divulge all his secrets for the dish, but he says it all comes down to seasoning.

"Some people are scared to over-season or maybe they don't want to spend money on the seasoning," he says. "It's all about the seasoning. We do ours spicy, and we've got a little bit of flak for that, but people have grown to love it."

Styr has a menu of some Southern staples as well as the Chicago-based Italian beef (a favorite of his). He and his wife also work on developing specials while at home or from the help of customers on their social media pages. But what he says is a big attraction for his restaurant is the side dishes.

"I want people to feel like it's a holiday when they come in, and it's like, you're filling up a plate, because you just want a little bit of everything," he says. "We hear that a lot of, 'I want all the sides.'"

Side dishes may sound like an aside, but Stansberry spends hours in his kitchen preparing collard greens, mac and cheese, red beans and rice, and gumbo.

For his gumbo, it all starts with the roux. A good roux — consisting of oil and flour — means standing by the pot for an hour, stirring frequently.

"You got to stir, stir, stir. And it's something that you can't rush. It's one of those things where you got to turn the music on. It's like a three-beer cook," he laughs. "Right when it gets just past copper penny, you're about there. If you start smelling burnt popcorn, you went too far."

The gumbo is a party of flavors, filled with chunks of andouille sausage, ham and juicy shrimp. As with catfish, Stansberry doesn't skimp on spices in the gumbo — there just isn't room in this dish for hot sauce.

After being in business for more than three years, refining his menu and building a fanbase in the Eugene-Springfield area, Stansberry has some plans for his business. In the short term, he's excited to bring out the pressure cooker deep fryer for turkey over Thanksgiving, and looking further ahead, he has hopes of expanding the business as a franchise.

But about whether he's surpassed his mom as a cook, he laughs.

"My mom will always say she's the better cook," Stansberry says. "I wouldn't say I've improved her recipes. But I've done them justice."

Styr Kurbside Kitchen is open 10 am to 7 pm Wednesday through Sunday at 152 28th Street, Springfield. Find on Facebook.

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