

Chef brings New Orleans influence to Astoria

Popular chefs team up at Silver Salmon Grille

BY MORGAN GRINDY

John Sowa has introduced the authentic flavors of New Orleans to many cities. Astoria will be his last.

Sowa's restaurant and bar, Sweet Basil's Cafe, was a beloved spot in Cannon Beach before it became another casualty of the coronavirus pandemic after it closed in May.

Now, Sowa is making his mark at Astoria's Silver Salmon Grille with his long-time friend, chef Jeff Martin. He brings 40 years of experience as a chef and his vibrant Cajun menu to the restaurant.

"We ate at each other's places back then. He would come have Cajun food and I'd come up here and have seafood," Sowa said.

The duo reopened Silver Salmon in June with Sowa's Cajun and part of Martin's seafood menu.

Learning from the pros

Sowa learned how to cook authentic Creole and Cajun dishes from well-known

New Orleans chefs Paul Prudhomme and Peter Lutzen.

"I'm a hands-on kinda guy. I just enjoyed being in the kitchen learning from the old pros. The old Italians; the old Cajuns," Sowa said. "I fell in love with Cajun cooking. It was just so unusual to me ... As a kid coming from Brooklyn, New York, the food was so unusual and the people were so friendly. The whole scene just came together."

In the early 90s, Sowa opened a restaurant in Long Island that specialized in Cajun and Creole food, where Lutzen later joined him.

"It became a scene on Long Island. We had all the old beatniks coming out, and we'd have to close the place down because they wouldn't leave," Sowa said.

Sowa eventually sold his Long Island restaurant and decided he'd had enough of the East Coast's fast-paced, brisk life.

"I just got burnt out. New York just burnt me out," Sowa said. "So, in '99 we just made a leap of faith to go west."

Sowa and his wife, Deb, moved to Seaside, where she grew up. They bought the



Morgan Grindy

Chef John Sowa is teaming up with Silver Salmon Grille's chef Jeff Martin to bring Cajun and seafood meals to patrons.

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Photographs on Aluminum

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