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Going whole hog

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Chef Manny Augello, creator of the Pig's Head Dinner at Jolie's Louisiana Bistro in Lafayette, is seen with a "forgotten New Orleans breakfast"-- hog's head cheese on top of grits with a poached egg. By Leslie Westbrook October 12, 2011

Written by **Diane Pantaleo**

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Serving up locally grown and raised foods at restaurants is a growing trend in Acadiana and around the country. Jolie's Louisiana Bistro has been a leader in the farm-to-table movement, but now the restaurant is taking the concept to a new level.

Those familiar with farm-to-table dining would recognize much about the restaurant's latest innovation — locally grown fruit, vegetables and grains paired with great microbrews and wines. But the main ingredient is raising some eyebrows.

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Each course of Jolie's Pig's Head 5 Ways Dinner features — you guessed it — some part of a pig's head. The dinner is a completely different experience each time. In fact, head chef Manny Augello

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The Pig's Head 5 Ways Dinner is \$50 per person, for parties of two to eight people. To schedule a dinner, you must call Jolie's a week in advance at 337-504-

said he usually doesn't prepare the menu until he gets the pig head provided by Eunice Superette and Slaughterhouse. The dinner is divided into five courses with five different parts of the pig's head. Diners will get to try courses prepared with the cheek, tongue, ear, the head, which is usually a hog's head cheese, and a wild card category — anything goes.

Notable about the dinner is the ingredients' local origins, which Augello's wife Abi said is the result of slowly building relationships with local farmers.

"A lot of farmers have been burned in the past by restaurants trying to work with them," she said. Local farmers had even been reluctant to divulge the location of their farms at first, but as time passed and the business relationship grew, the farmers started sharing information.

Augello added that he spends anywhere from 16 to 18 hours a week ordering ingredients from local farmers, as opposed to only two or three hours a week other restaurants might spend ordering from larger farms that may have been grown out of season.

"It's a matter of commitment," he said. "Anybody can sit in an office, punch in numbers and order ingredients."

The concept of the Pig's Head 5 Ways Dinner is largely the result of Augello's constant experimentation and desire to try new things.

"There's a lot of different components of the head that we don't use," he said, adding that they got to thinking about how they could use these components in a five-course meal.

Dinners may include salads such as the one crafted for the pig's ear category, made with local sprouts, micro collard greens and preserved persimmon tossed with a charred onion vinaigrette and fried pig's ear, which has a flavor similar to cracklins'.

Another example is grits topped with hog's head cheese and a poached egg. General manager Chelsie Lovell pairs all meals with a specifically chosen beer, cocktail or wine.

Although these two are definite possibilities, you never know what you might get on your menu for the evening. Augello said they're constantly experimenting and trying new ideas, including brain ravioli, which is still in the works.

"We do brain children and concepts that we throw around late at night," he said. "There's a lot of trial and error. Some things may work, some may not."

The concept might make a pickier diner squeamish, which Manny's wife, Abi, acknowledges, joking that in a lot of cases, one guest usually drags in the other. However, she said, they always find that they love pig's head, just like any other dish they might try for the first time.

In addition to the opportunity to try something new and as locally grown as you can get, the Pig's Head 5 Ways Dinner can also be a learning opportunity — whether you're chatting about how a meal is prepared, or discussing cocktails at the bar.

"It's kind of got a cool, nerdy thing about it. We're all nerds," Abi Aguello said. "It's a great way to be involved and passionate with your food."

Plans are in the works to create dinners centered on other seasonal ingredients, as well — fresh from local farmers, which Abi said is what makes the meals so special.

"It's important to understand why it's so special, not just from a chef's perspective," she said. "Someone grew that arugala with love."

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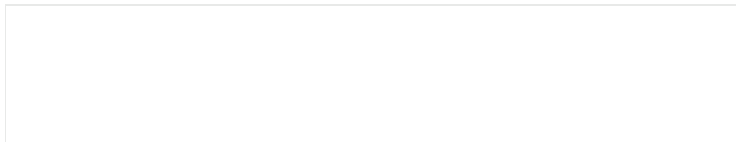
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