

Slice of Life

Noah Martin

MC3103

12/9/2024

Cuisine is a major part of every culture, and down south in Acadiana, jambalaya and gumbo reign supreme.

Many who have grown up in Acadiana have a similar experience to Sullivan Zant, one of the “Gravy Boys.” Zant’s grandfather cooked gumbo when it got chilly, and it made Zant understand the power food has to bring people together.

“I think the love for food, for me at least, isn't as much about the taste of it sometimes as much as the memories it can create and bring back,” Zant said.

The Gravy Boys would rather focus on a different, less popular dish of the region. These conduits of spice are set on having a good time. What started as a Taco Tuesday of nine friends became a group passion.

They met in college at the University of Louisiana-Lafayette. Some worked together, some lived together, and some took classes together. Eventually, a calorie-filled bond was formed.

Later, one of the Gravy Boys, Tanner Dimmick, had an idea.

“I proposed we start cooking gravy so that I could enter the cooking competition at Blackpot Festival here in Lafayette,” Dimmick said.

Dimmick was the original gravy mastermind. Zant would cook the sides, and Jacob Gibson would cook rice, the Cajun constant ingredient. There are misconceptions about Cajun food like there are in most cultures.

“Two misconceptions that immediately come to mind are that Cajun food is unhealthy and that it’s too spicy. These can be true but can also be avoided,” Jacob Gibson said.

The idea of doing gravy continued and eventually became a Thursday ordeal. “Gravy Thursday” stayed gravy because Zant said, “Gravy has a lot more versatility than most dishes and doesn’t have a lot of strict rules, so it allows us to go off the cuff and be creative.”

Even though the original idea was to compete with the gravy, it has become a bi-weekly occasion. The gravy cooking led to karaoke; karaoke led to a house party; and it all led to a tradition.

“Thus, the Gravy Boys were born,” Zant said.

In addition to Zant and Dimmick, the Gravy Boys consist of Trey Delcrambe, Jacob Gibson, Jordon Konow, Jordan Ardoin, Josh Mata, Sam Frazier and Derrick Savoie.

The best cook in the group title is still up in the air. Everyone in the group has cooked and worked together to make gravy.

“I have to plead the Fifth on that one. That title is interchangeable on any given day,” Dimmick said with a smile.

The gravy gatherings wouldn't just be a sophisticated dining experience. It would be a Southern get-together. There is music, alcohol, poker and beer pong. Music of all different genres plays during their time-consuming gravy. There are no traditional tunes.

“The only true tradition with music is that once all the food was done and ready to be served, we would play the song ‘Ultralight Beam’ by Kanye West,” Delcrambe said.

The originally intimate gravy session eventually grew a crowd. The guys are a team now and have their hardware. Each of them has a denim jacket with Gravy Boys embroidered which they wear when competing in Cajun cooking competitions.

They understand they will never be able to perfect gravy, but they will keep trying. They never follow a recipe.

“We cook from the heart and what’s available to us,” Zant said.

It isn’t about perfecting the recipe but the ability to keep trying. They have one goal set in mind when producing the gravy. The best moment after cooking for a group is the silence of people taking their first couple of bites.

“I can’t remember the last time one of us cooked a gravy and there were leftovers. That’s all that matters,” Zant said.

The group doesn’t just do it to compete. They try to bridge the gap in their culture. Cajun culture is very important to them. It is a unique culture, and they are proud to produce such a meaningful part of it through food.

“Cajun culture is unique in a lot of ways. Language, music, religion, art, food and dance. What we have here in the Acadiana region is unlike anything else in the world,” Zant said. “We continue the traditions passed down by our grandparents and parents.”

One quote that rings true for this group is from a local musician they appreciate. Jourdan Thibodeaux said, “If you’re not living your culture, you’re killing it.”

The Gravy Boys’ main desire is to meet new people from different walks of life and share what Cajun culture looks and tastes like. In no way do they want to gatekeep the beautiful culture in which they were born.

###

Sources:

Sullivan Zant, (337) 368-4698

Trey Delcrambe, Instagram through Zant

Jacob Gibson, Instagram through Zant

Tanner Dimmick, Instagram through Zant

