

Todd A. Price
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Review: Ignatius Eatery and Grocery



DINING OUT

Ignatius Eatery and Grocery

In the months after the hurricane, Ignatius Eatery and Grocery would have been an oasis. The menu includes everything you might miss about Louisiana: from jambalaya and muffulettas to red beans and roast beef po-boys. The freshly decorated room tries hard for an old New Orleans air with statues of saints perched in the corners and walls faux finished with nicotine stains. Bottles of Barq's are served with little glasses, just like at Casamento's down the street. The stereo plays "Hey Pocky Way" and "Iko Iko."

Smack in the middle of Magazine Street near Napoleon, the restaurant's embrace of all things New Orleans seems overeager. Slices of Leidenheimer bread in a brown paper bag are fine. A bottle of beer in a paper bag is charming, but pushing it. Serving wine in a paper bag verges into parody.

The menu clings to the classics, and plenty of people will compare the food to what comes out of their mama's kitchen. The crawfish étouffée promised "fresh Louisiana crawfish tails," but that didn't stop the dish from being too one-dimensional. (Actually, Ignatius uses fresh Louisiana crawfish when possible, then local crawfish that were caught and frozen during crawfish season, and only uses imports as a last resort.) Oddly, the Creole jambalaya, a little dry the day I tried it, had a big scoop of corn macque choux in the middle. The earthy jambalaya didn't benefit from the sweet contrast of corn.

Ignatius certainly has dishes that will bring me back. Open on Mondays, it's a good spot for a creamy plate of red beans and rice. Ignatius imports good boudin links from Cajun country, which can be damn near impossible to find in New Orleans. I could eat the potato salad by the bucket. The large potato chunks mixed with mayonnaise, bacon and scallions almost taste like a well-dressed baked potato. On the chicken salad po-boy, the tangy pickles and layer of Creole mustard add some zing to the homey main ingredient.

Uptown New Orleans needs more casual lunch and dinner spots. Ignatius could soon become a fixture. It just needs to work out a few kinks in the kitchen and relax. When New Orleans is right outside the door, we don't need to be reminded of the city every minute of our meal. *4200 Magazine St., 896-2225, Thr.-Mon. 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m.*

—Todd A. Price