

eat&drink

Scallops with sherry cream sauce, bacon and mushrooms
LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE PHOTOS

TAKE THE BAIT

A VETERAN SEAFOOD RESTAURATEUR REBOOTS WITH FAHLSTROM'S IN LAKEVIEW

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

Sometimes life is like a bowl of cereal. It can be engaging, always offering something to chew on. Other times, it can turn in to a soggy mess, like it did when veteran seafood restaurateur Glenn Fahlstrom (Davis Street Fish Market, Jonathan Livingston Seafood) found himself embroiled in a legal dispute with his business partners over his namesake Glenn's Diner (1820 W. Montrose Ave.) in 2012. Instead of seeing out a protracted disagreement in court to the bitter end, Fahlstrom cut bait and opened Fahlstrom's Fresh Fish Market last month in Lakeview.

At Fahlstrom's, he's recreated the very best parts of Glenn's: the rotating chalkboard seafood specials menu, the egg-heavy weekend brunch and, yes, the famous cereal wall. But he's also gone a step further by adding a seafood market and what he hopes becomes a Potbelly-esque seafood sandwich takeout business. I stopped in to see if Fahlstrom's is shaping out to be a watered-down imitation or an improvement over the original.

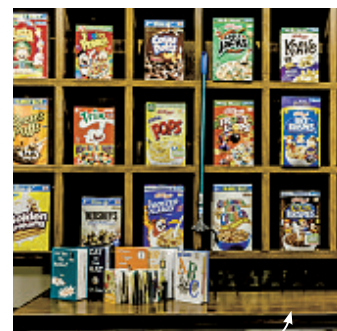
The scene: "We get everyone from 17 to 70 [years old] because of the product we offer," Fahlstrom said. That's no lie. On a recent Saturday night, a couple of teens texted while snacking on crabcakes at one table while ladies-night-out groups guzzled white wine at another. The stroller mafia—young parents toting disposable Mickey Mouse placemats and their Pepperidge Farm goldfish-gumming progeny—invaded the rest of the dining room, trimmed with mahogany-colored wood and chalkboard menus.

Likes: Fahlstrom's menu is the "Ulysses" of diner menus: a stream of culinary consciousness codifying everything from burgers and blue tilapia to waffles and whitefish. Every seafood fantasy is within reach, but you could go crazy without a plan. Mine was to focus on the chalkboard seafood menu offerings. You will not get fancy platings with most of the fish, but rather a thick and hearty sauce plus a side of parmesan-dusted potatoes and perfectly grilled asparagus. Thick meaty scallops are

grilled until golden and enrobed in a sherry cream sauce filled with bacon lardons and knobby pan-sauteed mushrooms, probably my favorite dish of the night (\$27.95). I was also a big fan of the smoky trout dip (\$9.95), thick clam chowder (\$3.99 a cup) and the key lime pie. I doubt there's a better slice served in Chicago than this, thanks to its tangy, buttery curd and toasty graham cracker crust.

Gripes: My server was effusive but noncommittal. According to him, everything on offer was great and he couldn't just isolate a few dishes, which is pretty rough when it feels like there are a hundred dishes to choose from.

When pressed, he recommended the pan-fried Peruvian blue-tilapia (\$19.95) encrusted with crushed Apple Jacks cereal. This thin cutlet mottled with green and orange bits is one of Fahlstrom's most popular dishes; to me, it looked like stuffed animal roadkill. Though crispy on the outside and juicy inside, the saccharine cinnamon-apple taste stuck at the back of my throat with every bite. I also had high hopes for the New Orleans barbecued shrimp (\$19.95). This regional specialty, invented at Pascal's Manale



THE CEREAL WALL

Wooden cubbies stuffed with a grocer's aisle of full-size cereal boxes were a trademark feature at Glenn's Diner. "I knew I wanted to serve cereal, and not the mini-boxes so many diners have, so I brought a full-size box with me as I looked at real estate," former owner Glenn Fahlstrom said. "I looked at 30 restaurants in eight days, and I kid you not, the last place we looked at on Montrose, it was a former tapas restaurant. They had these wooden cubbies which held Spanish artifacts and whatnot. I put the cereal box inside one and it fit perfectly," Fahlstrom recreated the cereal display in his new restaurant, Fahlstrom's Fish Market, and \$4.99 will buy you the cereal of your choice with fresh fruit and a carafe of ice cold milk.

and perfected at Mr. B's Bistro, features unpeeled head-on shrimp swimming in a brackish brew of butter, garlic and worcestershire sauce, all dusted with cayenne. It's definitely not the cloying barbecue sauce- and butter-drizzled concoction Fahlstrom's serves. The shrimp are plump and well-cooked, served with al dente rice and deliciously crumbly cornbread cakes on the side. Those who want sweet glazed shrimp will be happy; those who want a faithful bayou recreation will be disappointed. "That's my chef's recipe," Fahlstrom said. "I gotta let him have creative freedom. We're tuning it. We've added more butter and worcestershire. I think it's close."

Bottom line: Fahlstrom's has all the good bits of Glenn's Diner—the cereal wall and the fish specials—but unlike the current Glenn's, Fahlstrom's also has its namesake proprietor, the gregarious Glenn Fahlstrom. Not every dish was a home run, but if you stay away from the gimmicks (cereal-crusted fish) and go with the classics (chowder, scallops), Fahlstrom's could be a low-key alternative to a big downtown seafood dinner.

REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE.

REDEYE@TRIBUNE.COM | @REDEYEATDRINK

Take it or leave it
Fahlstrom's Fresh Fish Market
1258 W. Belmont Ave.
773-281-6000