## **GUMBO**

Three Chefs, 8125 S. Halsted St. 773-483-810

## By Michael Nagrant | FORREDEYE

You may have had a decent bowl of gumbo in Chicago, but chances are, it's no match for the bowl at Three Chefs (\$5.99 for a small bowl, \$9.99 for a large bowl) in Auburn Gresham. All the components that make this gumbo great—the dark and brackish roux (a cooked mix of fat and flour that thickens gumbo), chubby curls of pink shrimp, slivers of garlicky chicken sausage, sweet pepper and cayenne—combine to warm your soul.

"There's no big pot [of gumbo] sitting around," owner and executive chef Wallace Effort said. "We saute the shrimp and the vegetables fresh each time. People love it so much, I'm trying to figure out how to vacuumpack it and get some of that Jewel money."

At Three Chefs, which is celebrating its fourth year of business this spring, Effort only dabbles in the Cajun and Creole. "There's no Creole background in my bloodline that I know of," he said. Despite

that, when Effort focuses on New Orleansstyle cuisine, for example serving up moist and flaky blackened cattish lacquered in a crawfish gravy (\$9.99), the result is — excuse me for going all Emeril on you—bam-tastic.

Before opening Three Chefs, Effort worked a number of gigs, including a stint at Spiaggia, and eventually became an executive sous chef for a major food service company. While taking some time off, Effort, who lives in Englewood, said, "Every time I went looking for good food, I had to leave the neighborhood. I was excited when a friend found the location [for Three Chefs]. "Though he heard the building had been condemned for more than eight years and was in bad shape, Effort wasn't deterred. "This is my passion and it's what I do," he said. "I'll cook for free if I have to, you know I knew I could handle [fixing up the space]."

The state of the space wasn't the only obstacle Effort faced. The restaurant is called



Three Chefs because Effort had two other business partners that walked away before the space opened. But changing the name to One Chef Restaurant isn't in the plans. "We do have three chefs working on weekends, so the name still works," Effort said.

Effort's hard work is paying off. When I stopped in for lunch on a recent Saturday, the place was packed. The same weekend, Mayor Emanuel stopped in and ordered takeout.

Effore's carfish, spectacular from-scratch biscuits topped with quivering pepperflecked turkey sausage gravy (\$3.98), and cloud-light sweet potato-pecan flapjacks (\$7,70) are cooked only after you place your order. Because Three Chefs makes so much on the fly, you will wait—and wait, and wait some more—for your food to arrive. But, in a neighborhood where the restaurants are primarily polish sausage joints and Italian beef stands that throw food straight from deep freeze and into the deep fryer, Three Chefs is a sweet anomaly worth waiting for.

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

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