

## Come south, my friends



By Michael Philippi  
Ungaretti & Harris • Restaurant Critic

**T**hey didn't give this as the "official" reason Chicago got aced out of the Olympics, but I am pretty sure that it is because they canceled the South Side Irish Parade. This 30-year tradition that brought North and South sides together as one is done. Okay, so of the few hundred thousand people who show up, a few get a little tipsy. And some of these tipsy ones behave badly, loudly and obnoxiously. Big deal. A city like ours has to cancel a tradition like this because a few bad drunks decide that restrooms are wherever they want them to be? Surely this was a problem that could have been solved short of just bagging the whole thing.

But that's what happened, and that's why the Olympics aren't coming. If the prospect of maintaining order in the face of drunken Kiss-me-I'm-Irish-wearing Gen-Xers is too daunting, how on earth would we manage millions of people (some of whom may also behave badly, and in foreign languages at that) in dozens of venues all across the city? Betcha they don't cancel Carnivale in Rio because of a couple of drunks.

So now that there is no parade all you North Siders need to come south anyway — for the food. And I don't mean the thin crust pizza — although that's pretty good. Café 103 is a tiny BYOB bistro in Beverly. Seating 25 or so, with a prime window table for six if you can get it, it is a hidden foodie paradise that we like to keep to ourselves, here in the neighborhood, but since the parade is gone the rest of you need another reason to come south.

It has a smart, minimal interior — warm and comfortable with knowledgeable and friendly servers to help you through the impressive menu. Starters include Prince Edward Island mussels served about a dozen to an order in a light white wine and chorizo sauce. They

are fresh, meaty and mild. Don't do bivalves? How about seared sea scallops with crisp sweet potato pancakes in a truffle vinaigrette? Crispy on the outside and moist and salty in the middle — just like downtown, only better. Vegetarians can try the smoked mozzarella gnocchi. Tender and filled with fresh mozzarella, it's a big hearty starter because after all, this is the South Side and teeny portions don't fly like they might on West Fulton Market. They also usually do a braised short rib that is good, not great. It's pre-shredded, which pushes it to be a little dry, and the parsnip puree makes a nice presentation but doesn't add much in the flavor department. Normally, salads don't get too many of my thousand-word allotment, but the romaine, apple and bacon salad warrants an exception. It is plenty big to share and tossed with a creamy cheddar dressing that you will have to remember is a condiment, not a beverage.

Then there are the entrées. Fish options include pecan-crust sea bass with red pepper fettuccine in a white butter sauce with green beans and fennel — crisp on the outside and flaky and mild — or the barramundi, which is sort of an Australian walleye, served here in a generous filet with tomato, thyme and garlic polenta. But this is the South Side, and that means there better be meat on the menu. How about Beef Wellington? Yep, the real thing: a perfect filet encased in flaky, golden brown puff pastry sitting atop a Madeira reduction served with house-made garlic mashed potatoes and baby carrots. The rack of lamb is as advertised: two double thick-cut chops served over couscous and sautéed spinach. If you are a rack of lamb person, you won't be disappointed. But you will be disappointed if at least one of you doesn't order the best pork chop in the city in any restaurant not named

after a coach who won a Super Bowl. I didn't expect this level of pork chop in a foodie joint, but it is seriously worth the ride.

Stay for dessert. The carrot cake is just like carrot cake is supposed to be: a big slab of moist cake with thick cream cheese frosting. The chocolate lava cake will satisfy your chocolate jones, but it could do with a little more lava. All in all, if you like tiny bistros with chefs who aren't afraid to cook up to the usual crowd, this is a place you should try.

**Traveler's Tip:** Since the South Side is more foreign to a lot of lawyers than say, New York, this month's traveler's tip is Koda, another bistro in Beverly. Koda has a great bar and a more than decent wine list. Also upscale contemporary in style, try the escargot as an appetizer and good luck not using up all your crusty bread soaking up the garlic butter. Entrées are seasonal, but two tried-and-true ones are sautéed skate, served in a beurre blanc sauce with capers, and the short rib, which will flake off the bone with your spoon.

**Lagniappe:** Keeping with the theme, check out the Beverly Arts Center. This 400-seat venue will serve you the drink of your choice while you sit back and listen to legendary artists like Dr. John, Dave Mason, Dickey Betts or Roger McQuinn. Come in the summer for the free jazz in the courtyard. Better yet, stop at 103 or Koda for dinner and then catch the show. ■

#### Pleadings:

Café 103  
1909 W. 103rd St, Chicago  
(773) 238-5115

#### Court costs:

Appetizers: \$6-\$10  
Entrées: \$16-\$24

**Verdict:** 

mphilippi@uhlaw.com