

## River raves



By Michael Philippi  
Ungaretti & Harris • Restaurant Critic

**T**here has been a lot of talk about the Chicago River lately, and why not? It's a pretty cool river. When Chicago was just growing up it flowed into the lake, leaving all sorts of trash (you don't need the details; this is a food column) in the drinking water of our great city. So we just reversed the flow of it. What kind of people, over 100 years ago no less, simply reverse the flow of a river? The same kind of people who dye it green once a year just for the hell of it, that's who: Chicagoans. The river was pretty nasty in the 1990s, too. No, it never lit up like the Cuyahoga, and the oil slicks were contained, but it was pretty stinky. It's not stinky anymore.

Other cities have river walks. San Antonio talks big about one, but it's really sort of a creek. We have a real river and real restaurants that run alongside it.

I went to Fulton's on the River the other day. Fulton's has been there forever and for two good reasons. The food is great, and you can't beat the view.

Deviled egg fan? These aren't your grandmother's deviled eggs that you eat real fast before the mayo sits in the sun too long. These come as an appetizer, and they are a mountain (well, a foothill anyway) of whipped, creamy egg yolk topped with a smattering of black caviar. The black against the burnt yellow of the whipped yolks settled in the perfect hard-boiled whites made for a great presentation, but the show was the taste. Creamy with an earthy undertone, methinks truffle oil is somehow involved.

They are a little tricky to eat: too big to just pop like Grandma's, but after one bite, if you can't figure out how to get the rest in your mouth and not your suit, you need to turn in your ISBA card. Other choices were fish tacos, tilapia served with just enough spice. Fulton's

is great in the winter too, with a huge party room with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the river.

Flatwater is the next stop to the west. Plenty of seating on the river, with an outside bar, big, comfy couches and even some shaded spots.

The crabcakes come two to an order, lots of crab and very little bread, served on a bed of mixed greens with a surprisingly tasty remoulade sauce. Colorful and buttery, this is one fine crabcake. The house-made guacamole is a keeper — a big portion, plenty of chips and pico de gallo. A little bland maybe, but you can always add heat.

For entrees we tried the grilled portabello sandwich, which was pan-fried in butter, like you would a really good grilled cheese at home when your cardiologist isn't looking, with tender portabello, pesto, the right amount of red onions and plenty of sharp, melted Swiss cheese all on whole grain (so that it's healthy) bread. The braised pork tacos were sweet and tender and not at all greasy. Moist and delicious, they are served with candied jalapenos and grilled pineapples. The jalapenos gave it a little bite of that sweet/hot that works perfectly against the char grill of the pork. Could have been more of those, but it was a great dish, and what a great place to hang out.

On the other side of the river is a little joint called, appropriately, Lagniappe Creole Cajun Joynt. It boasts truly eclectic and alarmingly delicious chicken wings and waffles. This is the perfect joint for Big Easy fare — sans oil slicks. Flatwater and Fulton's are nice places, with nice insides, nice bathrooms and what Southsiders call North Side menus. Not Lagniappe. This place is a carry-out with a short but well-planned menu of po' boys, crawfish boil (with all the trappings), boudin

and jamabalaya. Don't leave until you try the fried green tomatoes, which come four to an order with coarse mustard and are crisply breaded, hot and with a delicious summer tomato taste that is not at all overpowered by the breading. The po' boys come in half and whole; half a shrimp gets you about a dozen or so little perfectly fried shrimp, dressed up in a roll and, for a bonus, a small adult version of sweet tea, which is sort of like sangria but better. It is the perfect thing to sip on Thursday evenings when they have a blues band playing on the river. Don't go to this place if you have fancy clients you want to impress. Don't miss it, though, if you are a little low-brow and want good food, good drinks and maybe a little blues.

**Travelers tip:** For those downtown associates who are forced to the wilds of Markham to handle traffic tickets for clients' kids, here is a reason to be happy about this rite of passage — Hog Wild — a barbecue emporium at 151st Street and Pulaski Road. Five minutes from the courthouse, it is like walking into a supper club, complete with a huge freshwater fish-tank, pine paneling and some of the best pulled pork, pork chops and brisket in town. Next time Biff Junior clocks triple digits in Daddy's Jag, ask for the Markham gig. ■

### Pleadings:

Fulton's on the River  
315 North LaSalle Drive, Chicago  
(312) 822-0100  
Flatwater  
321 N. Clark St., Chicago  
(312) 644-0283  
Lagniappe Creole Cajun Joynt  
55 West Riverwalk South, Chicago  
(312) 726-7716

Verdict: 

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