

Crawfish Junction is destination restaurant

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It's not every day you find a restaurant willing to grow and serve its own produce. Or work hard to team up with local food suppliers. Yet that's been a mainstay for the new co-owners of Crawfish Junction, Corey McGrath and Torey Smith.

The two officially took over on March 1 by purchasing the property and business. They've been running operations since Oct. 1. The old owner, Lesley Erb, moved down to Florida to be with family.

Both McGrath and Smith have been involved with the restaurant business since around 2005. Both started as dishwashers at Saucey's at the Lake Mills Golf Club. They worked their way up to managers. McGrath worked at Joseph Megan's Restaurant in Lake Mills as well.

McGrath started as a line cook in 2012 at Crawfish Junction. He eventually became head chef/manager. Smith started at Crawfish Junction in 2013 as a line cook and eventually became assistant manager, and then general manager.

"We're good at it and enjoy doing it," said Smith. "Owning a restaurant was one of the things we talked about down the road, like as a long-term plan. The opportunity just presented itself and we jumped on it."

A motto of the restaurant reads, "Family, friendship and teamwork is what makes Crawfish Junction great."

A garden on the premises provides produce to the restaurant, and the restaurant is partnered with Kraemer Wisconsin Cheese, Ltd., in Watertown. Kraemer provides regional cheeses to the restaurant's famous Stinky Cheese Day, which also features live entertainment. The event happens each year in March.

The two also are working with a couple local farmers to increase the amount of local food

available in the restaurant. And last summer there was a "Farm to Table" event the restaurant did in downtown Lake Mills, which featured local fresh produce.

As for future plans for the restaurant, McGrath and Smith want to redo their old menus. "We want to add even more specialty burgers. As it is, we have lots of flavors, lots of toppings," said Smith.

The co-owners plan to keep the atmosphere of the bar alive, which is best summed up by this slogan: "If you want it, we've got it! Featuring a rustic, casual atmosphere, awesome drinks, fun people, live entertainment and some very unique food. Come out for our award winning, out of this world Friday Fish Fry, huge sandwiches, insane burgers, steaks, seafood and prime rib. It's preposterously perfected for an unordinary extraordinary experience. Try saying that fast five times!"

The restaurant was featured in Best of Wisconsin as one of the most unique and amazing restaurants.

The article read, "While its name recites crawfish—and they do have that—Crawfish Junction is famous for bringing an alligator dish to Wisconsin. If you have a picky eater, they have a great Friday Night Fish Fry and a household sta-

ple of sandwiches on their menu. Beware: The place fills up quickly!"

The restaurant was also featured in The Daily Jefferson County Union's Best of the Area reader's poll in July 2015. It was voted number one in around a dozen categories like Best Restaurant, Best Customer Service and Best Steak.

Crawfish Junction also won the Best of Madison Fish Fry Category in Feb. 2015.

In the future, McGrath and Smith would also like to get more involved with event catering.

The two co-owners plan on continuing their work with fundraisers. For instance, they hold "Pints For Paws" yearly with the Watertown Humane Society and Custom Canines Service Dog Academy out of Madison, which trains service dogs for veterans with PTSD, the blind and therapy uses.

They also plan on keeping with the mainstay summer events, like live music out on the patio area.

The location has been a bar dating back to the 1850s. Before Erb took over the bar in 2005, it was called Olde and Cragely's. Before that it was called Layton's and was famous for its steaks.

For more information, visit the restaurant's website at www.crawfishjunction.com.



Crawfish Junction provides a rustic setting for a great meal. (Photo submitted by Crawfish Junction)



One of many mouth-watering dishes to be had at Crawfish Junction. (Photo submitted by Crawfish Junction)



Crawfish Junction is located at W6376 Cty. Rd. A in Johnson Creek. (Photo submitted by Crawfish Junction)

Excerpt from 'Warriors, Saints, and Scoundrels'

Editor's note: The following is an excerpt from the 2017 Wisconsin Historical Society Press book "Warriors, Saints, and Scoundrels: Brief Portraits of Real People Who Shaped Wisconsin" by Michael Edmonds and Samantha Snyder. It is reproduced here with permission.

Excerpt from chapter 44: Morris Pratt (1820-1902, Founder of Psychic Academy)

In the 1850s, during the wave of spiritualism that swept the nation, one Wisconsin convert established a spiritualist institute that still exists today.

Morris Pratt was born in New York in 1820, the son of settlers who moved westward after arriving from England. He came to Wisconsin in the mid-1850s, and at Whitewater, near Milton, he prospered by purchasing and reselling the land around him.

At that time, Whitewater was becoming a center of the spiritualist movement, and Pratt, like many others, became a true believer. He even promised to donate his wealth to further the



The Morris Pratt Institute, ca. 1902, as pictured in "Warriors, Saints, and Scoundrels." (Wisconsin Historical Images ID 79802)

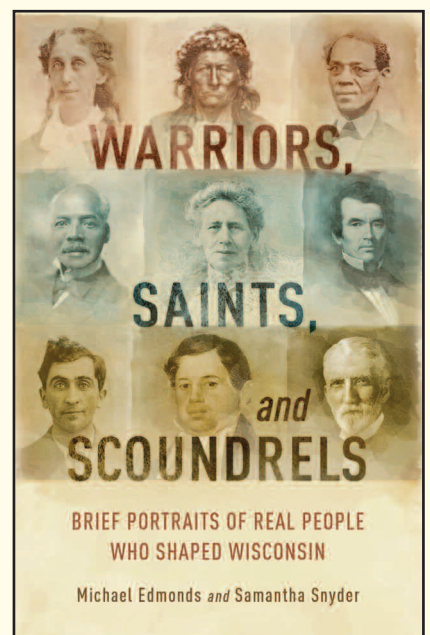
cause, if he ever grew rich. In 1884, he invested his life savings of \$4,000 with fellow mystic Mary Hayes-Chynoweth, whose guiding spirit had instructed her to buy a specific tract of northern forest. It turned out to contain some of the richest iron ore in the Gogebic Range, and Pratt was soon worth more than \$200,000.

True to his word, he constructed an \$80,000 building in downtown Whitewater for a spiritualist academy. Known lo-

cally as "Pratt's Folly," the Morris Pratt Institute enrolled its first students in 1902. The curriculum contained a typical slate of conventional courses, augmented by classes in psychic studies, mediumship, and the science of séances.

Morris Pratt died of a stroke in 1902, after a long life devoted largely to spiritualism. Though some suspected the school would close after his death, it still exists today, relocated to West Allis, and students there still study clairvoyance, telepathy, mediumship, and psychic surgery, among other subjects. Its graduates go on to serve as clergy in dozens of churches that belong to the National Spiritualist Association.

Readers can learn more about Morris Pratt in the "The Remarkable Story of the Morris Pratt Institute," *Whitewater Register*, October 10, 1918; Carol Lohry Cartwright, "Spiritualism and the Morris Pratt Institute," unpublished paper given October 9, 2011, to the *Whitewater Historical Society*, online at whitewaterhistoricalsociety.org/index.php/morris-pratt-institute.



The cover of "Warriors, Saints, and Scoundrels." (Photo courtesy of Wisconsin Historical Society Press)