

Severson cranks up the Cajun at Emigail's Roadhouse

By Benjamin A. Bovee
Revised from last year's
Lakes Edition

For more than 15 years, Scot Severson has been cooking Cajun cuisine at Emigail's Roadhouse. From catfish to crawfish and jambalaya to gumbo, Emigail's dining menu is sure to have something for everyone. They even serve alligator—Severson recommends trying it grilled.

Named after his two daughters, Emily and Abigail, Emigail's Roadhouse is nestled neatly along State Highway 59, just off of I-90 in Newville, almost on the water of the Rock River. Emigail's Roadhouse stands as a testament to Severson's vision for his restaurant.

"At the beginning when I bought the place I didn't really have something in mind for what I was going to do," said Severson. "But, walking in here and looking at it, I said, 'this is a rough building,' it just reeked of this roadhouse atmosphere—much more so than it was country cooking. [It was] Cajun cooking."

Guided by this inspiration, Severson developed his concept for what Emigail's would become. "It wasn't overnight," he said. "It took a long time to do all this." According to Severson, it took one month of renovations by himself and a number of his friends just to open the doors of that "rough build-

ing" as a restaurant.

"You would shake your head if you had seen this place," he said. "I was speechless. The first couple of years here were the hardest. Believe me, there were a lot of obstacles."

Though it was a challenge for Severson in the beginning, he persevered to build—sometimes in a literal sense—Emigail's Roadhouse into the restaurant it is today.

"The original menu was a small card-type menu, two pages folded," Severson recalled. "We started off small—my gosh—I'm back there looking at it, thinking about what we do now—we sell soups and sandwiches and entrees."

If one walked into Emigail's today, the roadhouse looks anything but "rough." Over the last 15 years, Severson has honed his restaurant into a must-try dining experience. Warm-hued wooden chairs and tables spaced around the dining room invite people into the low-lit restaurant. A long wooden bar stretches across the back of the dining room, ready to provide patrons with ample refreshments. Flat-screen televisions hang from the walls, providing a view of whatever is playing to all who are present.

One of the most striking features of Emigail's is the a colorful mural, painted by a local artist, Chris Horvath, about five years ago. "I had this idea

about doing something on the wall," Severson said, "and I skimmed some ideas about what I'd like to see done, and this is all his work."

Horvath did his work well. It is impossible to enter the restaurant without the scene of crawfish, alligators and a cook-pot set in a bayou swamp catching the eye. The mural is further augmented by fishnets, hanging like curtains on either side of the wall painting.

Finishing off the wall are the bold, black, laser-cut letters set in stark relief amidst the mural. They read, "Emigail's Roadhouse—almost on the water" Obviously, Severson wanted to make sure people knew exactly where they were when they were eating some of the best Cajun cooking money can buy.

Immediately after noticing the mural, one realizes there are dozens of signed dollar bills hanging from the ceiling. "One guy wanted to leave something behind, so he signed his name to a dollar bill and we stapled it to the ceiling," said Severson. Since then, many more patrons have followed suit. Each one, a memory of somebody's visit to Emigail's Roadhouse.

"They just volunteer a dollar. We give them a marker and they sign their name to it," Severson continued. "I'm not doing anything with them. They are just there for people to



Meet Scot Severson, owner and cook of Emigail's Roadhouse, where he has been cooking Cajun right for over 15 years. (Photo courtesy Scot Severson)

see who's been here."

"The cute thing about it is, there was a family who left two [dollars] behind this past winter. They came back again a year later looking for their dollar and left two more."

Looking around, one begins to notice yet another of the many charms of Emigail's Roadhouse. Framed photos of Severson's travels across the country and around the world dot the walls of the dining area. "I wanted to be a photographer," said the seasoned cook. "I went to school for one year." However, the life of a professional photographer was not in his cards.

Nevertheless, through Emigail's, Severson has been able to blend his passion for cooking with his love of photography. Like a coffee table book,

the pages of which are the walls, Emigail's allows diners to journey with Severson to parts unknown, across the country and around the world—all while they enjoy his long practiced Cajun cooking.

"I am kind of a maverick. I don't like being called a chef. I've never been trained [as a chef]. Everything I've learned and done, I've done on my own," said Severson. "I tell people I'm not a chef. I don't make pretty food—I am a cook who makes pretty good food."

Be that as it may, the customers keep coming to Emigail's Roadhouse all year long. "I enjoy meeting the people," said Severson. "Especially the ones I've grown to have a real good acquaintance with." Clearly, Severson's "pretty good food" has es-

tablished itself as an area favorite.

"Cajun doesn't have to be overpowering," Severson explains. "It is supposed to be a good blend of flavor, so it's how you blend it together. Cajun cooking is simple actually. But, it's time consuming. You're working things together in a procession of ways to make it taste good."

"I get excited when I'm making something and it turns out fabulous," Severson stated. "My joy comes when someone compliments my cooking—finished product done right."

Emigail's Roadhouse, located at 650 E. State Hwy. 59 in Newville, is open Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. until 9 p.m., and Sunday 9 a.m. until 8 p.m.

Local Grill & Bar



We are often told
"Better than
New Orleans"

Best
Margaritas
in Town!!!

Featuring:

- Authentic Cajun Cooking
- BBQ Ribs • Jambalaya



Open for Lunch
Serving: Tuesday thru Saturday
11 a.m. - 9 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.



Emigail's Roadhouse 651 E. Hwy. 59, Newville • 608-884-7922