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Italian, Lebanese heritage shapes Ely's

Ex-salesman capitalizes on family tradition

11:38 PM, Feb. 26, 2011 | Comments



The menu at Elys Restaurant & Bar features many Middle Eastern dishes influenced by the owner's heritage. / Greg Jenson/The Clarion-Ledger



Written by **LaReeca Rucker**

Richard Shapley grew up in a blended American family, experiencing an array of food from several cultures.

His grandmother was Italian, and his grandfather, Elias "Ely" Shapley, was Lebanese.

"I had tons of great food growing up," he said.

The family made a name for itself in the food business. While some relatives owned grocery stores and restaurants in Clarksdale and Greenville, his uncle, Mark Shapley, launched Shapley's restaurant in Jackson in the mid-1980s. It was sold in 1998.

After working a while in pharmaceutical

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Chef Robert Washington prepares stuffed shrimp and a 22-ounce U.S.D.A. prime rib-eye steak Wednesday at Ely's Restaurant & Bar in Ridgeland. Owner Richard Shapley (rear) opened the eatery in 2008. / Greg Jenson/The Clarion-Ledger

If you go

What: Ely's Restaurant & Bar. n Where: 115 W. Jackson St., Ridgeland.

When: 4 p.m. until, Monday- Saturday; reservations accepted but not necessary except on peak holidays.

Cost: Entrees range from \$18.99 to \$45.

Contact: (601) 605-6359 or elysrestaurant.com.

sales, Richard Shapley decided he wanted to get involved in the restaurant business.

"I thought now is the time to attempt it with no regrets," he said. "Thankfully, things worked out. It's one of those things that kind of eats on you until you get a move on it."

Shapley opened the contemporary Ely's Restaurant and Bar at 115 W. Jackson St. in Ridgeland in 2008.

"We opened up at the worst possible time we could have opened, but we are one of the pioneers in Old Towne in Ridgeland or the Jackson Street District," he said. "We are in a great geographic location for people in Jackson to get here.

"Although they may not realize we are not around here, we are right off 51 upstairs overlooking the historic Jackson Street District and train tracks."

Shapley said the restaurant is named after his grandfather.

"We were kicking around ideas and, obviously, our last name was already taken," he said. "My grandfather was the backbone of the Shapley family. He was a very generous, loving guy and fiercely loyal to his friends. He treated people well and absolutely loved his family. He was a great role model, and he had a great sense of humor."

Shapley describes the restaurant as a "new American steak and seafood house."

"It's not just about the food; it's about the service," he said. "You want people to feel like they did more than just have dinner."

Shapley said the restaurant menu has evolved, but the core has remained the same.

He names the bone-in filet as one of his top choices.

"It's the filet you love cooked with the bone on it, which adds a richness to the steak," he said. "It's a more beefy flavored filet, but still incredibly lean."

Shapley said Ely's offers several steak toppings, including stuffed shrimp, crab cakes, jumbo lump crab, crawfish and fresh scallops.

Another signature dish is an appetizer called Eggplant Ely.

"It is three layers of fried eggplant with jumbo lump crabmeat and a

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lemon cream sauce," he said.

The Gorgonzola Asiago macaroni and cheese is a popular side item.

Shapley said his mom makes many of the restaurant's desserts in-house, and some are family recipes.

"We have a very good bread pudding with a banana rum sauce that's very popular," he said.

The venue is not a Lebanese restaurant, but it offers several Middle Eastern dishes that may be influenced by Ely Shapley's heritage, including Ely's baked kibbeh - a family recipe with beef, bulgur wheat, pine nuts and spices.

The restaurant also serves hummus dip seasoned with lemon, garlic and tahini; and a tabouli salad with bulgur wheat, parsley, green onions, tomatoes, spices, olive oil and lemon juice.

Jackie Burns, head server, said the restaurant offers a fine dining atmosphere.

"We believe in quality, consistency and fresh ingredients, and when you put those three together, it's a winning combination," she said. "I have been in the food industry since 1987, and I've always wanted to own my own fine dining restaurant. I wouldn't change one thing Richard has done."

She said the filet is excellent, but also recommends the New York strip.

Bar manager Blake Strong suggests a Pineapple Ely made from a pineapple-infused vodka.

Shapley also has a product called Ely's All-Purpose Seasoning that is being sold in gourmet food stores like Jackson's The Everyday Gourmet. He said it's great on beef, poultry, seafood and vegetables.

"We're going to start selling our remoulade dressing pretty soon," he said.

The restaurant can seat around 75 in the main room. It also has a private dining area that can hold around 25.

To comment on this story, call LaReeca Rucker at (601) 961-7034.

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