

## NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

*Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions*

*By Ned Hémard*

### **Monica Monica and More Monica**

Crawfish Monica® has become, in just a few short years, one of New Orleans' favorite dishes. Consistently rated the most delicious offering at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, the line at the Crawfish Monica booth is usually the longest at the Fairgrounds. But one won't find this delicacy just anywhere, especially not at a fictional chain restaurant named "Shenanigans".

In the 2005 film *Waiting*, filmed in and around the New Orleans metro area, the action takes place at a former Bennigan's Restaurant staffed with crude psycho cooks, gangsta rappin' busboys and an angry wait staff. Totally devoid of good taste (in both the lewd and food sense), the movie is the work of first-time writer-director Rob McKittrick and stars Ryan Reynolds and Dane Cook. Don't get them upset, and don't order the potatoes.

But in this laugh-out-loud, hygiene-deprived (and depraved) food service romp, New Orleanians will spot another familiar Monica. Playing the role of Dean's mom in the opening scenes is Dr. Monica Monica (ophthamologist, political candidate, actress and real-life mom).

Dr. Monica has parlayed her unusual name into a bankable item, but she wasn't the first. Old-timers may remember the hilarious 1953 episode of Groucho Marx's *You Bet Your Life*, when he had as a guest Pedro Gonzalez-Gonzalez:

Groucho: "If we got together as an act, what would it be called?"

Contestant Gonzales-Gonzales: "It would be Gonzales-Gonzales and Marx."

Groucho: (to the audience) "Do you believe that? Two men in the act, and I get third billing!"

A Phi Beta Kappa and *cum laude* graduate of Tulane University, Dr. Monica received her Ph.D. and M.D. degrees from LSU Medical School. She also obtained a post-graduate degree in health care administration

from Tulane, married and set up her medical practice in ophthalmology.

In 1999, Dr. Monica campaigned to fill the House of Representatives vacancy left by Bob Livingston. An advocate for malpractice reform and other issues, her run for Congress brought some unusual publicity since Monica Lewinsky was in the news at the time.

"This is not a politically cute trick, claimed Monica Monica. "I was Monica long before the other one." In fact, she was Monica Monica Long. And her husband, Dan Long, is an ophthalmologist, too.

Dr. Monica put significant time and resources into the race, but lost to David Vitter. She was again a candidate in the 2000 general election, but did not make a serious showing. She dabbled in acting with a part in the 2004 TV movie *Miracle Run*, played a geology teacher in *Glory Road* (2006), came alive in *Stay Alive* (2006) and *Cirque du Freak: The Vampire's Assistant* (2009).

In 2005, Dr. Monica's Robert E. Lee Boulevard practice was utterly destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. And in 2007, she ran unsuccessfully for the Louisiana State Senate.

As to her double name, she asked her father, "Did you stutter, or what?"

So where does one find Crawfish Monica®?

The simple yet elegant dish is the creation of Cajun Kettle Foods President and Chef, Pierre "Pete" Hilzim, who named the recipe for his wife. Pete's company is an award-winning kettle cook operation that produces high quality sauces, soups and marinades for what the company calls "premier free-standing restaurants and restaurant chains nationwide". The nationally trademarked crawfish creation has been number one among Jazz Fest attendees, numbering over one half million visitors annually.

The rich crustacean concoction has been around for twenty-seven years (as of 2009), but was only available at Jazz Fest or by shipment from Cajun Kettle. But 2009 marks the début of Crawfish Monica® in ROUSES and other local supermarkets. The ingredients remain a secret, but one can rely that butter, cream, onions and garlic are involved. Chef John Folse wrote that his "good friend, Pete Hilzim ... traditionally serves the dish with crêpes or over pasta".

And Chef Pete joined forces with the Chef Relief Organization to feed thousands of Hurricane Katrina shelter victims and rescue personnel.

About ten years before Crawfish Monica® first hit the Fairgrounds for Jazz Fest, the International Association of Astacology (IAA) was founded in Austria (a long way from Breaux Bridge), dedicated to the "wise utilization of freshwater crayfish". It's difficult to envision a

wiser utilization than a topping of Monica Sauce (which would also taste fantastic with shrimp, oysters or crabmeat). Maybe even atop mahi mahi. Mmm Mmm!

## **NED HÉMARD**

New Orleans Nostalgia  
"Monica Monica and More Monica"  
Ned Hémard  
Copyright 2009