



# CAJUN JACK’S BAR & GRILL

BY RICH BELMONT

Thank you blackie71 for telling me about Cajun Jack’s Bar & Grill in Elizabeth, IL. In your email you said you went there for fried oysters but the catfish was the best you have had in the area. You also said the trio of oysters, fried shrimp and catfish was well worth it. You certainly know what you are talking about because you are so right!

Cajun Jack’s is an interesting place to visit. It is located in the former Sharks Roadhouse which was closed and left vacant for two years. There are several kinds of wildlife to study while having a Cajun cocktail and waiting for your order of authentic Cajun food. There is a bear, moose, deer, antelope, bison, dolphin, great white shark and a couple of hammerhead sharks to ponder.



Jacky Jacobs is the owner of Cajun Jack’s. She opened on June 23, 2017. She is from Savanna, IL and has been involved with restaurants her whole life. Her parents owned

Palisades Tap and her uncle was the proprietor of The Brunswick. On a business trip she and her husband stopped in Texarkana, Texas to visit her uncle Jack Mills who owned Fat Jack’s Oyster Bar. It just so happened his manager was leaving so he invited Jacky to take over as General Manager. She stayed for 13 years.

Jack Mills served his first oyster out of a shack in 1985. He was also from Savanna but developed a love for Cajun food when he attended Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas. Jack was passionate about his Cajun cuisine. Over the next 30 years he modified many traditional recipes and made them his own.

Sadly, Jack passed away in 2015. His Fat Jack’s Oyster Bar is in Texarkana and also in Hot Springs and they are both as popular as ever.

Jacky and her husband decided to move back to Savanna and she is honored to be able to continue Jack’s legacy where he grew up.

Of course she has some expert help at Cajun Jack’s. She brought with her from Texarkana her Uncle Jack’s secret recipes and cooking techniques. She also brought Fat Jack’s Oyster Bar’s Head Chef.



Michael Sellers is the Chef. He is from Mount Vernon, Texas and started cooking there when he was 16. He was a cook at The Veranda Piney Woods Retreat and Barnstormers both in Mount Vernon. He moved to Texarkana and applied

for a job at Fat Jack’s. He cooked next to Jack Mills for the next 14 years. The manager is Katie Herrig. She holds a degree in Business Administration. She worked at Fat Jack’s Oyster Bar for 5 years and when she moved back to Illinois she was a Bar Manager at Fried Green Tomatoes in Galena.

Cajun Jack’s menu is mostly comprised of Cajun dishes with a few Creole foods added in for variety. What’s the difference between Cajun and Creole you ask? They are two distinct cultures. An oversimplified way to describe their cuisines is to think of Creole cuisine as city food and Cajun cuisine as country food. At one time Creole food was considered more upscale with expensive ingredients. Cajun was rustic utilizing cheaper and locally available meats and seafood. Today Creole and Cajun are evolving into one type of Southern Cuisine. NOLA (an abbreviation for New Orleans, Louisiana) food is all about the liberal application of seasonings including garlic, bay leaf, white pepper, black peppercorn, cayenne pepper, oregano, mustard, mace, basil, thyme, celery seed, tarragon, cardamom and paprika.

Cajun cuisine is about bold flavors and is not at all spicy hot. So don’t be afraid to try new things. You don’t get



CRAWTAIL PASTA

a lot of heat from this food but if you prefer a bit of a burn there are condiments on your table including “Slap Ya Mama” Seasoning and Louisiana Hot Sauce.

Serving Cajun Cuisine in the Midwest is no easy task. Many of Cajun Jack’s specialties are prepared with crab, oysters, crawtail and alligator. This seafood is delivered once a week and must be ordered a week in advance of shipment.

All the sauces including Creole, shrimp cocktail, salsa and remoulade are all made in the kitchen.

The bar is well stocked. There is a large list of domestic and imported beers and quite an assortment of craft beers: in fact there are 27 of them on the current beer menu. I suggest you get into the Cajun spirit by imbibing on one of the house specialty cocktails. These include:

- SAZERAC – a NOLA classic with rye whiskey, bitters and absinthe
- GATOR BITE – a sweet green cocktail that shows its teeth with 151 proof rum
- HURRICANE – a favorite French Quarter fruity rum filled drink
- FAH-YUH ‘RITA – the tequila isn’t the only thing that burns in this Cajun margarita
- CRAZY CAJUN – like a Long Island Iced Tea except it was born on the Bayou

Cajun Jack’s is now offering a daily soup. Some of the possibilities include Chicken Noodle, Tortilla, Chili and Wisconsin Three Cheese.

The Burgers are American and they are excellent. They are Ground Chuck Half Pounders and you decide if you want them cooked on the flat top grill or on the charbroiler.

On a recent visit I had the Daily Lunch Special which was a Cajun Burger that was unusual and extremely tasty. The burger was topped with blue cheese and Andouille (an-doo-ee). This is a pork sausage made with garlic, hot chili peppers, onions, wine and seasonings. It is a hallmark of Cajun cuisine. Chef Sellers added his own remoulade that tasted a lot like 1000 island dressing.

The Oysters are a real treat for Midwestern mollusk lovers. They are supplied by Louisiana Oyster fishermen and their taste can vary slightly depending on what lakes they are from. Three of the Oyster specialties are:

- Seahorses – no, these are not actual seahorses. They are oysters wrapped in bacon and topped with cheese and shrimp.
- Oysters Rockefeller – oysters are topped with a spinach soufflé and grated cheddar cheese. (Fun Fact: this dish was created in 1899 and named for John D. Rockefeller who was the wealthiest American at the time. Oysters Rockefeller are so rich it was said only wealthy people could afford them.)
- Oysters Bienville – oysters are topped with a New Orleans Bienville. This is a stuffing made with white wine, shrimp, flour and egg and green onion tops. This is one of Jack Mill’s modified recipes and it is simply spectacular. (Fun Fact: the original Oysters Bienville was created by Chef Auguste Michel at Antoine’s in New Orleans. It is named in honor of Jean de Baptiste Le Moyne, French Governor of Louisiana who was known as Sieur de Bienville. He established a French Colony near the mouth of the Mississippi River and called it La Nouvelle Orleans.)



Here are some more of the specialties perfected at Fat Jack’s and recreated for us by Chef Sellers in Elizabeth:

- Etouffée (ay-too-fay) – the word is French for smothered and is used to describe a stewed dish cooked with little or no liquid in a tightly closed pot. Chef Sellers sautés the standard Cajun holy trinity of onions, bell peppers



and celery. He adds Chablis white wine, seafood base, and shrimp. He then adds in crab and a cream soup.

- Crawfish Bread – baked hoagie roll topped with Creole sauce, craw tails and cheddar cheese.
- Jack’s Caps – in my opinion these are fantastic! Six large hollowed out white button mushrooms are stuffed with Creole sauce. You can mix or match the caps to be stuffed with shrimp, oyster or crawtails. Then there is a topping of that Bienville stuffing.

By the way, Chef Sellers Creole Sauce is made with a stock of the holy trinity, a secret cheese based sauce, cream of mushroom soup and Cajun spices.

There are some specialties you will just want to take home with you after dinner including:

- Seafood Gumbo – made with a dark roux, shrimp, crab and crawtail, onions, green peppers and filé powder (fee-lay) made from the pulverized leaf of the sassafras tree.
- Red Beans and Rice – red beans, rice and andouille in a tasty soup.
- Crab & Shrimp Etouffée – the aforementioned crab and shrimp stew.

These can be purchased in large sizes for takeout.

Other very popular entrées include:

- Shrimp Basket – 8 jumbo size (21/25 per pound) shrimp butterflied and coated by hand with an awesome tasting batter.
- Shrimp Po’Boy – a popular NOLA sub sandwich. Six butterflied and hand battered shrimp deep fried and placed in a hoagie bun. I like to jazz mine up by adding shrimp cocktail sauce, Slap Ya Mama Seasoning and Louisiana Hot Sauce. (Fun Fact: In NOLA a “dressed” Po’Boy means a topping of lettuce, tomato, mayo and pickles).
- Chicken Spaghetti, Shrimp or Crawtail Pasta – the pasta is cooked perfectly and finished with a generous portion of your chosen topping.
- Ribeye Steak Dinner – it is hand-cut and marinated in a secret sauce for 24 hours then cooked on the charbroiler.



On all my visits to this bar and grill I was served by Vicki Rodgers. She is friendly, attentive and could answer all my questions about Cajun cuisine.



I enjoy the tastes of Cajun Jack’s cuisine so much I am busy trying to get 75 of my closest friends to join me for a private gathering. The party room can comfortably seat 75 people and I see no reason why I shouldn’t be able to fill the entire room!

## CAJUN JACK’S BAR & GRILL

1336 US 20, ELIZABETH, IL 61028 • 815-858-3535

**Hours:** Bar: Sun–Thu: 10 AM–11 PM; Fri–Sat: 10 AM–1 AM  
Kitchen: 7 days 11 AM–10 PM  
**Dining Style:** Come As You Are  
**Noise Level:** Conversational  
**Recommendations:** Crab Cakes, Jack’s Shrimp Dip, Jack’s Japs, Jack’s Caps, Cajun Stuffed Mushrooms, Crawfish Bread, Oysters on The Half Shell, Oysters Rockefeller, Oysters Bienville, Seahorses, Seafood Gumbo, Red Beans & Rice, Crab & Shrimp Etouffée, Shrimp Basket, Trifecta Basket, Shrimp Po’ Boy, Crawtail Pasta, Hamburgers, Ribeye Dinner  
**Liquor Service:** Full Bar  
**Bar Specialties:** Crazy Cajun, Sazerac, Gator Bite, Hurricane, Fah-Yuh Rita  
**Prices:** Appetizers: \$3.25–\$12.95  
Lunch/Dinner: \$4.25–\$22.95  
**Pay Options:** Cash, Debit, All Credit Cards, NO Checks, ATM on Premises  
**Accessibility:** Front Door & Restrooms  
**Kids Policy:** Menu, High Chair, Booster  
**Reservations:** Yes • **Catering:** Yes • **Take Out:** Yes  
**Delivery:** No • **Parking:** Private Lot

