

# The Business

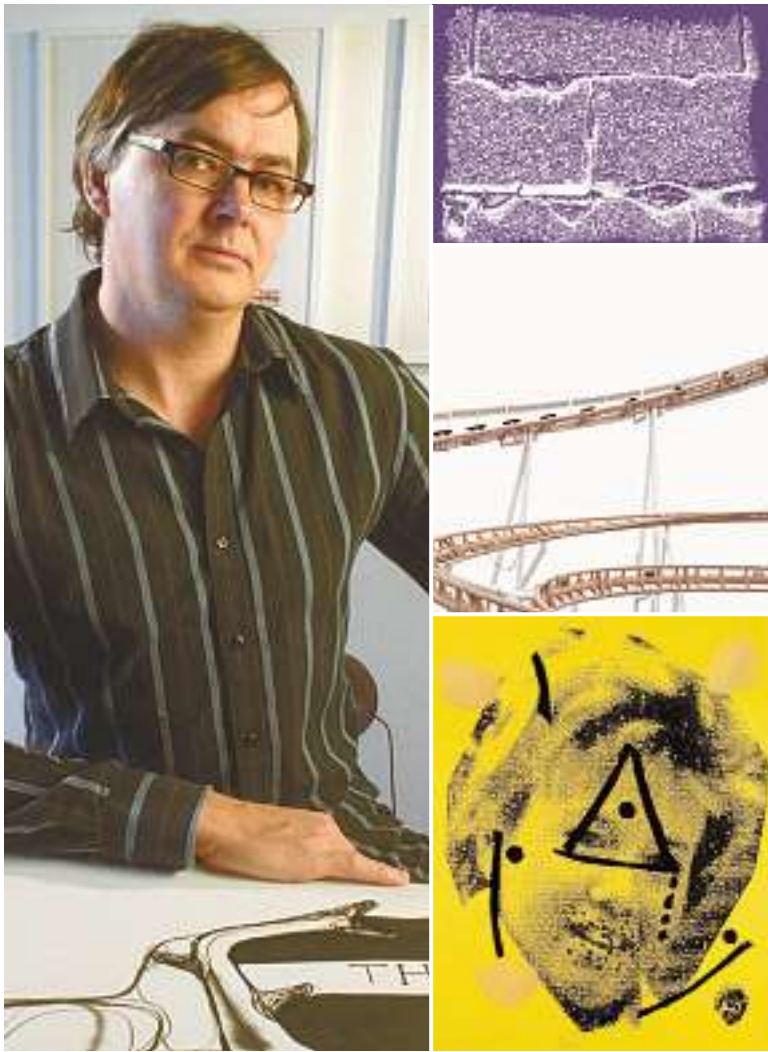
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## The Traveling Salesman

Curator Dan Devening will bring his latest group show right to your door.

By Deanna Isaacs

If you ask me, gallery phobia is an urban myth. Has anyone actually seen hard-driving young professionals dripping in cash but too intimidated to walk through a gallery door? But painter and curator Dan Devening says they're out there, and his current project, "Wherever," is aimed at cultivating them, in part by taking a cue from Tupperware. Devening commissioned 17 artists to make limited-edition multiples (30 pieces and 6 proofs each) on the theme of "place." He's got the work up on his Web site, [deveningprojects.com](http://deveningprojects.com), and is showing it by appointment at his studio near Garfield Park. He's also making house calls for small groups, carting along pieces like Tony Tasset's plaster and bronze mud pies and Carol Jackson's leather coasters. He says he's done five of these so far, with an impressive 80 percent of attendees making a purchase. About half the artists in "Wherever" are established, the others emerging, but most have never done multiples. Everything is priced under \$1,000 except Tasset's pies, which are \$1,500. A boxed set of the whole project is less than \$12,000—a great way to jump-start a collection, Devening says. (Preselected! Gallery-free!) Devening describes "Wherever" as an experiment: a show without an installation, a gallery without a space. His own work can be found at Roy Boyd.



Dan Devening with a piece from Mark Booth's series "The Antlers," other works for sale by Christine Tarkowski, Michael Pfisterer, and William O'Brien

### Also: Don't Suck

A panel of gallery owners decked out in the industry colors—black, black, black, and gray—reeled off a dos-and-don'ts list for an attentive audience of 120 at last week's Artists at Work forum at the Cultural Center. Moderated by Natalie van Straaten, executive director of the Chicago Art Dealers Association, the panel consisted of fledgling ceramics specialist Dubhe Carreno, established dealer Carrie Secrist, and veteran Carl Hammer. Besides no-brainers like knowing what the gallery shows, including an SASE, and keeping the artist's statement brief and clear, the list went like this: don't get chatty with gallery owners at art fairs (they want to talk to collectors there); don't schlep your actual creations into their space

(call and ask how they review work); don't ask them to critique your stuff (ask if they'll show it); don't show them everything you've ever done (they don't care about your development and they don't want to see more than 10 to 20 images); don't look too slick or push too hard. And keep in mind that it's all about the art.

Once you get a dealer the most important thing will be to Get Your Work Done on Time. Don't squander

your energy on nervous breakdowns. Take pictures of your pieces before you deliver them to the gallery in case something happens to them. If Hammer's your dealer, expect to be part of the team promoting your art, but if you're in Secrist's stable, leave the selling to her. And don't tell any of them how to install your show—that's what they do best, thank you. (Just last week Hammer was up all night stewing after taking an artist's suggestion on an

installation.) Do expect to share and share alike with your dealer—the standard cut is 50 percent—even on sales made in your studio. In return he or she will give you credibility, get you market price, and wrangle the collectors—not a job you want to tackle yourself. (Secrist has had to charge right into buyers' homes and rehang entire collections just to get past the "no more wall space" obstacle.) You'll generally get paid within 30 days of a sale, they say, but don't expect them to tell you who's buying. You may be family, but they're not sharing the client list. Carreno says artists who demand to see invoices are demonstrating a lack of trust.

### The Wisconsin Connection

Journalist and sometime curator Ryan Schulz and painter-photographer Jodi Navta looked familiar to each other when they met on an improv team at the Playground about five years ago. On their first date they discovered why: both had grown up summering around Green Lake, Wisconsin, a town they both thought could use an art gallery. The evening was so intense and awkward, Schulz says, that they both backed away and didn't date again for nine months. But things moved quickly after that: in early 2002 Schulz quit his job with a trade publisher and moved to Navta's Green Lake family farm; in April that year they opened Water Street Gallery in a building they bought and rehabbed in the neighboring town of Princeton. They married in 2003.

Their Princeton clientele was a summer crowd, about 75 percent from Chicago, Schulz says, and the couple had in mind from the beginning that they'd eventually expand to the city. Last October they grabbed a two-story building at 1039 W. Lake, and last weekend Navta Schulz Gallery opened with a show of work by their roster of 17 artists, ranging from established out-of-towners like Thaddeus Mosley to up-and-coming locals. Former Ripon College art professor Lester O. Schwartz, another longtime neighbor from Green Lake, is prominent among them. Schwartz, a painter and sculptor who's had work in shows at the Art Institute and the Metropolitan

Museum of Art, was an active figure in the art world of the 1940s before he settled in at Ripon, Schulz says. "We drove past his house every week on the way to our cottage. He had a huge sculpture garden. When I saw that [garden] I knew we were almost there. He's been an icon for me my entire life."

### Exposed

In his inane catalog essay for Barbara DeGenevieve's photography show at Gallery 400, "Objectifying the Abject: Exploitation, Political (In)Correctness and Ethical Dilemmas," Michael Weinstein argues that DeGenevieve puts to rest "once and for all" the racist fantasy in which a "white woman is imperiled by the figure of the lustful, feral black male." How does she do that? By offering a dozen homeless men \$100 each to bare their bodies and minds for a photo and video shoot, then setting up the five who agree in hotel rooms (where they're grateful simply to have clean towels), cajoling them to look sexy, and showing them porn to catch their reactions. Afterward, in a separate videotaped interview, she wants to know if they feel exploited. One does: "For what this entails," Hank Gooch says of his compensation, which had been set with an eye toward his usual income, "I don't think it should be based on what I get for holding up a sign." Last week, in a lecture and discussion at the gallery that included two of the men, both of whom "had a ball" and think this might launch their modeling careers, DeGenevieve explained that she designed the project to challenge her own political correctness. "I know I didn't exploit these guys," she said, right after she set up a donation box for them by the door. □



Gordon by Barbara DeGenevieve

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The New Reader Classifieds

# Restaurants

Listings are excerpted from the Reader Restaurant Finder, an online database of more than 3,000 Chicago-area restaurants. Restaurants are rated by more than 2,200 Reader Restaurant Raters, who feed us information and comments on their dining experiences. Web ratings are updated daily; print listings reflect the most current information available at publication time. Reviews are written by

Reader staff and contributors and (where noted) individual Raters. Though reviewers try to reflect the Restaurant Raters' input, reviews should be considered one person's opinion; the collective Raters' opinions are best expressed in the numbers. The complete listings and information on how to become a Reader Restaurant Rater are available at [www.chicagoreader.com/restaurantfinder](http://www.chicagoreader.com/restaurantfinder).

# R

## In Business

# Mardi Gras for Your Mouth

**M**ary Madison is stingy with her cooking secrets. How does she make cake in a jar? "It's a canning process. Let's just leave it at that," she says. What does she put in her hot, sweet greens? "A lot of love, a lot of care." What about the cakelike corn bread? "It's nothing more than flour, cornmeal, baking powder, sugar, a little salt, and some eggs and milk. That's the recipe," she says. "So now the cat's out the bag."

In most other respects, though, Madison, who owns the Cajun and creole restaurant Lagniappe, seems generous to a fault. Several years ago a homeless man asked her for food while she was dining with friends in the Loop. That led to "this vision to have a buffet under Wacker Drive" to feed the homeless. Madison, a Beverly native, was working as a chemist for the Sherwin-Williams paint company at the time. She started cooking food she'd take downtown and serve to the homeless every other weekend. Her efforts became Be a Blessing Homeless Ministry, affiliated with Saint James African Methodist Episcopal Church, where Madison is a member.

Eventually Madison decided to leave her job to start a catering business. Her plan was to pursue her interest in the Cajun and creole cuisine she'd grown up with (her family comes from Louisiana) and to provide a permanent kitchen for the ministry's food preparation. But zoning requirements forced her to offer carryout in addition to catering. "I was thinking, 'We'll sell a couple of dinners across the counter,'" Madison says.

In September 2004 Lagniappe opened in Auburn-Gresham, a location Madison finds hard to explain. "God told me to go to this place on 79th Street, and I could not understand it," she says. "I would not have personally chosen that spot myself. It was a step of blind faith." Shortly afterward the restaurant was discovered by regulars on the

**Lagniappe—A Creole Cajun Joynt**  
1525 W. 79th  
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Chicago culinary site LTHForum.com and began being talked up online. Slow but steady word of mouth led more and more diners to Madison's door; she estimates that at least half of her customers come from outside the neighborhood. Lagniappe now offers seating for about 20, and Madison is contemplating the creation of a separate catering division. She's making plans for a booth at this summer's Taste of Chicago, and in the next few months hopes to obtain her liquor license and offer outdoor seating and free WiFi. "My prayerful projected date is June 1," she says.

Lagniappe's menu is for the most part Cajun and creole. Entrees include chicken or shrimp creole, an etouffee of the day, jambalaya, and on Fridays shrimp, oyster, or catfish po'boys. (Vegetarian options are available on request.) Red beans and rice are available with or without a hunk of andouille sausage, brought up from Louisiana; side dishes range from dirty rice—made in what Madison calls the authentic way, with chicken spleen—to "candy sweets," candied sweet potatoes. Madison offers a few more generally southern dishes as well—fried green tomatoes, chicken wings and waffles, shrimp and grits, pulled pork sandwiches, and deep-fried turkey. Banana pudding is her most popular dessert, but there's also sweet potato pie, bread pudding, peach cobbler, and the mysterious cake in a jar. At a party hosted by the restaurant on Fat Tuesday, February 28 (part of the proceeds will go to victims of Hurricane Katrina), Madison will offer King Cake, a traditional Mardi Gras bread with green, purple, and yellow icing and baked with a baby Jesus figurine inside.

The only major snags Lagniappe has faced so far stemmed from factors outside Madison's control—the street construction that made parking nearby all but impossible for much of last year and her mother's ill-



Mary Madison at Lagniappe, sweet potatoes and chicken creole

ness and death last summer, when Madison was often forced to be out of town. During this time complaints about Lagniappe surfaced on LTHForum, but these were quelled once Madison returned, resumed her place in the kitchen, and posted a polite explanation of her absence on the site. Service at Lagniappe takes a while—expect to wait at least 20 minutes whether you're dining in or taking out—but it's courteous; the staff *sirs* and *ma'ams* everyone.

Madison still seems a bit surprised to be running a restaurant. "I can't help but see God in all of this," she says. "That something I took for granted as a hobby would have blossomed into something like this... It hasn't been easy, but he has been faithful." She maintains the attitude that led her to begin feeding Wacker Drive's homeless five years ago: "Well, Lord, if you mean for me to do it, you'll make a way." —Anne Ford

## Head South

Cajun, southern, and soul food

### Army & Lou's

422 E. 75th | 773-483-3100

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For over 60 years Army & Lou's has been dishing up well-executed southern and soul food to politicians (this place was one of Harold Washington's favorites), families, famous visitors, and average joes. Heading up the menu is Louisiana gumbo, made with hunks of only slightly slimy okra, andouille, and a hefty dose of file powder (i.e., sassafras leaf). In the bread basket are yeasty homemade biscuits, fresh, flaky, and warm. If you seek the quintessence of comfort food, sink into steak, chicken, or chops smothered with gravy and served with corn bread. Fried chicken has light, virtually unseasoned breading and is deliciously crispy. It's worth ordering a few extra sides: greens are tender but not overcooked; sweet potatoes carry a hint of clove; pickled beets and onions provide a tart contrast; and the chitterlings are... well, if you've never had butter-boiled pig intestines, now's the time to give 'em a shot (don't stint on the hot sauce). Sweet potato pie and peach cobbler are made, our waitress told us, by a "little old lady from the neighborhood" who comes by in the morning to bake—which is pretty much how they taste. **David Hammond**

### BJ's Market and Bakery

8734 S. Stony Island | 773-374-4700

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The food comes on plastic plates, but don't be fooled: the chef is John Meyers, formerly of the upscale Retreat in the Pullman mansion. Standards like red beans and rice, mustard-fried catfish, and heavily sauced, falling-off-the-bone-tender barbecued ribs are nicely seasoned. Homemade breads and desserts are a particular strength—there are potato rolls and slightly sweet corn muffins to accompany the meal, and for dessert goodies include sweet potato pie, peach cobbler, banana pudding, and carrot cake. You carry your own tray and fill your own soda, but for the price—nothing's over \$10—it's a great deal. The system is efficient too: order at the main counter and the headset-clad cashier signals the servers, who call your

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