



When *Louisiana Cookin'* magazine named Chef Lyle Broussard one of six 2016 Chefs to Watch, they affirmed what Southwest Louisiana already knew – Broussard has made an indelible mark in the culinary world and has changed the way people perceive Lake Area chefs and restaurants. After working at several area establishments, Chef Lyle was hired at Jack Daniel's Bar and Grill at L'Auberge Casino Resort Lake Charles in 2005 as a sous chef. He accepted a promotion as Jack Daniel's room chef in 2008, where he oversees all culinary operations and develops the menu. Broussard works in a barbeque restaurant, yet has become the face of creative Creole cuisine.

In addition to being included in the distinguished Chefs to Watch lineup, Broussard has earned dozens of awards and recognitions. This year alone, he was featured in the *Louisiana Travel Guide*, taped an episode of *Flip My Food* with celebrity chef Jeff Henderson, contributed to a SWLA Convention and Visitors Bureau tourism video featuring Cajun fusion cuisine, and celebrated a first place win when *Lagniappe* magazine awarded his Pimento Cheeseburger as '2016 Best Burger' in the region.

In 2015, Broussard graced the cover of *Acadiana Profile* magazine as one of their Best Chefs 2015. He appeared in a documentary of African-American chefs highlighting their Creole roots. And he represented the Louisiana

Lyle Broussard combines Creole cuisine and creativity to earn a spot as a 2016 Chef to Watch.

# first person

with **Lyle Broussard** by Angie Kay Dilmore

Culinary Trails initiative at the Texas Monthly Restaurant Take-Over in Austin, Texas. He was also one of ten chefs chosen to compete in the Louisiana Seafood Cook-off in New Orleans, where his Pan Roasted Gulf Grouper earned him a solid second place win (though Chef Lyle will tell you he tied for first place.)

When not experimenting in the kitchen, Broussard enjoys relaxing on his 20-acre farm, spending time with his family, dogs, and half a dozen Tennessee walking horses. They go on weekend-long trail rides, listen to zydeco bands, and of course, he and his brothers cook. A lot! *Thrive* magazine recently sat down with Chef Lyle and discovered what fuels his passion for food, family, and the importance of pushing the culinary envelope.

**Tell me about your background. Have you always loved to cook?** Cooking came kind of natural to me. My great-grandmother had this hole-in-the-wall restaurant. After she retired, my grandparents took over the place. I had aunts and uncles who worked there, in addition to their regular jobs. Back then, there were no babysitters, so they put us kids in the kitchen with my Aunt Pearl. And that's it.

**Who else influenced your love of cooking?** My mom and my family -- that's all they do. They cook, all the time. My grandfather was an oilfield worker, all throughout Louisiana. Sometimes he'd stay on the sites and we'd visit him. On Sundays, he'd cook a big lunch for all the guys before we'd head home.

**Tell me one of your most memorable food experiences as a child.** I remember the first time I tasted roux. I was six years old. I'd see Mom cooking something in a cast iron pot on the stove. It smelled good, and I thought it looked like chocolate. She told me it wasn't chocolate, but I still thought it was and she wouldn't let me have any. So one night, after she went to bed, I pulled a chair up to the stove and stuck my finger in it and tasted it. It wasn't chocolate!

**At what point in your life did you know you wanted to make a career as a chef?** I was in my early 20s, in college majoring in process plant technology. And I had to make a decision. Am I going to finish this or am I going to do what I really want? So then I went to SOWELA for culinary. The program then wasn't what it is today, but I kept learning. A couple chefs took me under their wing and one thing led to another. When I got here (L'Auberge) in 2005, I was still a little green. In 2008, they sent me to CIA (Culinary Institute of America), which helped a lot. That opened my eyes. I'd never been to

New York. Never had been on an airplane! Soon after, I became a certified Chef de Cuisine. Then everything took off.

**You hosted Al Roker and others from *The Today Show* in 2013 and I understand you served them quite a spread of Southwest Louisiana cuisine. What was their favorite dish?** They liked everything but they really liked the crawfish.

**What message do you hope to send to diners through the menu at Jack Daniel's?** We recently cut down our menu in order to focus on the things we do great, like barbeque, burgers, and brisket. We serve simple, easy, back-to-basics food. And it's gonna be good!

**Simple yes, but also creative, especially with your nightly specials. I make a burger with homemade bacon jelly. The other night we served pimento cheese fries. For awhile, we let our girls name the burgers. When you name a burger after a waitress, she's gonna sell it for you. Sometimes I make whatever I'm in the mood to eat. Sometimes it's a challenge, either from ourselves or from others -- like the time we made pigs' ears. We say, 'Let's try this,' or 'I wonder what this would taste like?'**

**How do you find a balance between keeping your menu fresh and exciting while also preserving the classic favorites?** Well, obviously gumbo ... nothing you can do with that. But some of our other classic favorites, we play with them a little bit, and do something special with them, without alienating them too much.

**What is your personal favorite dish on the menu?** Shrimp and grits. I could make you three different versions of shrimp and grits. They follow me around. I was in New Orleans a few months ago and made shrimp and grits for 3000 people.

**Do you ascribe to a particular kitchen/cooking philosophy?** I know I'm from Lake

Charles, but I don't allow that to limit me in what I can do. I challenge everything. I don't settle. I can make whatever I want.

**Like most things in life, cooking is an ongoing learning process. How do you strive to continually improve as a chef?** I learn something new every day. From the people around me, the people who work under me -- I try to take a little bit of that every day. Some chefs tend to get happy and complacent with where they're at. I never settle for what we've been doing. I try to look at everything everyday and try to improve it.

**What is the greatest compliment you have ever received from a customer?** A guy from Texas told me he loved my brisket. He said it over and over again.

**Of all the awards and recognitions you've received, which one means the most to you?** Winning first place in the Mardi Gras Gumbo Cook-Off [in 2012, 2014, and 2016, with a second place in 2013. They didn't participate in 2015]. That's braggin' rights, there.

**How do you see the future of restaurant cuisine in Lake Charles?** Too often in Lake Charles, we don't think outside the box. Some restaurants are never going to change. But we have some new restaurants in town with some guys who are pushing the envelope. We are headed for a new direction. I could have just stayed with ribs and étouffée and gumbo and people would have eaten it. But I wouldn't be satisfied with that.

**Describe your typical day off work.** I take care of my horses in the morning. Sometimes my friends will be out there already, and I'll end up spending all day and night out there. We cut the grass and cook. My mom calls and says, 'I have red beans,' and I say, 'I'll be there!'

**Name three things most people don't know about you.** I'm scared of heights, I can't swim, and I don't eat oysters.

