

Game Changer Nourishing the Community's Soul

Po'Shines is more than your average restaurant

written by Adam Sawyer

photography by Claire Thorington

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Executive chef James Bradley is a graduate of the Teach Me To Fish program. A Po'Shines regular places her order. Pastor E.D. Mondainé. The Po' Fish Platter (fried catfish, chicken wings, mac and cheese, and red beans and rice), bottom, and a buttermilk biscuit with molasses, top right.





PASTOR E.D. MONDAINÉ grew up on soul food. The St. Louis native can recall a time in his life when every member of the extended family excelled in one particular dish, taking pride in the way it filled bellies as well as hearts. “It was food created from the soul to feed the soul,” Mondainé said.

Mondainé would grow into a man who extended the tradition and meaning of soul food into just about every aspect of his life. He also wears many hats. In addition to being a pastor, he’s an activist, author, musician and now president of the Portland NAACP.

Long before taking his current position, Mondainé saw a trend and a need in his adopted home of Portland.

“There were a number of community members on public assistance,” he said, “just as talented or driven as anyone else, but defeated by the cycles of depression, abuse, and the resulting low self-esteem that contributes to the cycle’s continuation.”

He believed that with proper guidance and development, he could produce empowerment and opportunity. He was right.

He opened Po'Shines in the north Portland neighborhood of Kenton with a few goals in mind. More than a restaurant venture, it became home to a new initiative, a youth work organization called Teach Me To Fish (TMTF). A structured

training program, TMTF prepares participants for a career in the culinary arts while simultaneously teaching life skills. Po'Shines did more than bring in customers from all over town looking for authentic soul food, and TMTF affected more than the lives of those enrolled in the program.

Before the Celebration Tabernacle Church moved into its Denver Avenue location, the building was occupied by a biker bar called the Cactus Club. Po'shines was a drug store and the alley next to it was a hub for illicit behavior. TMTF was an outreach ministry that welcomed anyone wanting to help make things better, and the restaurant was a safe place where community members could work, learn, meet and break bread.

“We are diverse and community-conscious. That’s our goal,” Mondainé said. “We treat everyone who walks through the door like they’ve been coming here for years.”

The program and the eatery that it worked out of were a driving force behind Kenton’s revitalization. Since opening in 2007, Po'Shines and TMTF have expanded into multiple locations and a Culinary and Catering Clinic that offers an eighteen-month curriculum with clinics taught by some of the city’s top chefs. True to the very nature of soul food, Pastor Mondainé continues to nourish his community, in ways that go well beyond the dinner table. ■