

# Southern comfort food stars at The Fat Ham at King of Prussia Mall

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When you come up the front escalator from the parking lot and enter the world of Savor at King of Prussia Mall, you're delivered straight to the doorstep of The Fat Ham.

Award-winning chef-owner Kevin Sbraga's sit-down haven of Southern comfort food on North Gulph Road is front and center amid the sea of fast casual eateries that define the Savor concept, and it's the only self-contained, full-service restaurant in the high-end food court that now connects the two formerly separate malls.

"You come to the top of the escalator and we're right there, and you come from the other two directions and we're right there in the middle — so it's probably the best location in the entire mall," said the affable Sbraga, a season seven winner on the Bravo channel's "Top Chef" competition.

With his original University City restaurant of the same name drawing rapturous reviews from critics and Yelpers alike since its opening three years ago, Sbraga soon found himself being approached by mall owner Simon Property Group about establishing a Savor sequel.

"I wasn't sure about it because I never thought about opening a restaurant in a mall," he admitted. "Then I realized they were getting some great people in there and felt that it was something I wanted to be a part of. The mall and the operators around us have been great to work with."

From the tiniest of kitchens — "We push forward as hard as we can and as far as we can," Sbraga said — equipped with just two ovens, three fryers and a griddle, emerge such colossally savored specialties as the pulled pork sandwich (with Carolina BBQ sauce, of course, and accompanied by coleslaw; \$11); the new shrimp po' boy (\$13); the ever-popular chicken and waffles (\$16) and the recently added dipped chicken (with honey mustard, coleslaw and corn bread).

It's a short and sweet menu that deliberately doesn't duplicate University City down to the last mustard green.

"It's not exactly the same menu, but the same idea ... Southern comfort food meant to warm the soul," Sbraga said. "When we opened the first one the menu was very pork-centric, that's what it was all about. And it quickly became a chicken restaurant. A lot of times people will say, 'What is your signature item?' As an owner you can try and decide what that's going to be, but you don't really know until you get there and you open. Both restaurants have now turned into chicken restaurants," he added with a laugh.

For dessert, it's your choice of peanut butter-banana pudding (\$6) and red velvet cupcake (\$6).

While Sbraga allowed that he doesn't really have a favorite cuisine, Southern cooking has always been a big part of his cookery.

“I’m half African-American, so I grew up on soul food and lived down south for a little while, but it was really noticing a lack of Southern food in Philadelphia and I realized I can’t even go out and get Southern food. So that’s kind of how we started the first one: ‘OK, I’m going to open up a restaurant where I can go and eat.’ As we’ve grown we found more and more people are interested in that, so why not grow the concept? There’s not much else around quite like what we do at The Fat Ham.”

Sbraga’s formal culinary training was at Johnson & Wales University in Miami, after which he went on to hold positions at The Dining Room at The Ritz-Carlton in Naples, Fla., and Buckhead Life Restaurant Group in Atlanta, before returning to his Philadelphia roots. He then honed his skills under George Perrier at Le Mas Perrier, Washington Square, and at the venerable Ritz-Carlton, Philadelphia.

Among the rustic elements that characterize the unique setting of The Fat Ham is the bar, with its prominently stocked inventory of bourbons and vodkas that bring “the spirit of the South to the glass” with specialty cocktails like Stars Fell on Alabama and Porch Sippers, that serves primarily as a dining spot, much like the communal dining table.

“We’re really food-centric and we knew it would be more food than beverage because of the location,” Sbraga noted. “People tell you what they’re looking for by their buying habits. They’re not necessarily there to have a bunch of drinks. They may have one or two at night and that’s about it. The bar is more of a place to eat than to drink, so people will come in and eat at the bar because they’re shopping by themselves or it’s two people and they’re in a rush.”

Whether in a rush or not, it doesn’t take your average diner long to realize that there is no ham on the menu, fat or otherwise.

So why the appetizing name?

“The Fat Ham was a nickname for my son Angelo when he was born,” Sbraga said. “He used to ham it up and smile a lot, and that’s how I came up with the name.”