

“The Ya-Ka-Mein Lady” of New Orleans

Linda Green cooks up a culinary delight.

By Anita Oubre



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PHOTO PROVIDED BY LINDA GREEN, PHOTO TAKEN BY: GUS BENNETT, THE PEOPLES PROJECT.

Linda Green defines her success by having always applied a variation on the Golden Rule: “If you do not love what you are doing, why do it at all?”

Globally known as “The Ya-Ka-Mein Lady,” Linda is an award-winning culinarian who was born and raised in New Orleans. The pickup truck from which she serves her home-cooked soul food and her famous, trademarked Ya-Ka-Mein along parade routes, is a popular destination for celebrities and common folk alike who rave about her cooking prowess.

Ya-Ka-Mein is a spicy soup that is enjoyed in neighborhoods all across New Orleans. The soup is a meal in a cup filled with broth, noodles, bits of meat, and

topped off with a boiled egg and green onion. Linda noted that Ya-Ka-Mein “has been a staple in the city for ages” and that it originated from people of Chinese descent.

“When African Americans began to intermarry with the Chinese people, the dish became what we know today,” Linda explained. “The African Americans brought the spices and herbs to the noodles along with special cuts of meat left over from Sunday’s dinner. From these two cultures the dish was elevated

to become a popular dish that is sought after in the community,” she added.

The delicious broth consists of a secret juice handed down through the generations. Linda’s great grandmother, Georgiana, was widely known for making it. The neighbors were said to have followed the aroma from down the street, Linda laughed as she recalled the family history. “They called it ‘porch popping.’ The neighbors would line up at the door with their own bowl to get a taste of this soup, then they would sit on the porch and talk for hours.”

Some people even swear by its ingredients, saying that it is a great cure for a hangover. During second-line season in New Orleans a popular chant one might hear is someone singing, “Where the Ya-Ka-Mein Lady? Where she at? Where she at? I need that Old Sober.”

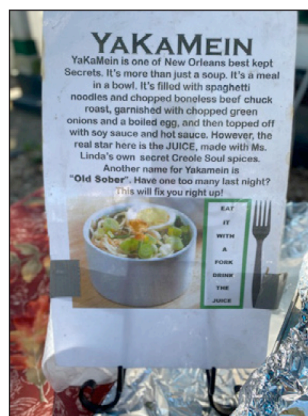
Linda has been a regular on the second-line routes for many years selling her famous Ya-Ka-Mein. “I have people get off the plane and the first thing they do when they get into a taxi is call and ask

me to get some ‘Old Sober’ ready for them,” she said.

Ya-Ka-Mein can also be found every year at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, along with Linda’s equally famous fried pork chop sandwich.

Linda grew up in the Central City neighborhood and attended Carter G. Woodson and Booker T. Washington high schools. On Third and Danneel streets Linda and her brother graduated from what she lovingly refers to as the “University of Shirley Green.” Their mother Shirley attended business college and worked for the city for a few years but for the majority of her working life she was employed by the Orleans Parish School Board as a cook.

It was through her love of cooking that



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Shirley met many people, including local dignitaries. A young Linda watched her mother’s every move and often helped in the kitchen. She learned to chop seasoning and how to properly set a table. It was through these loving lessons in the kitchen that the legacy was born which Linda would eventually pass on to her own children and grandchildren. “My mother told me to respect myself first and then I can respect everyone around me,” Linda fondly recalled.

Linda attended Delgado Community College where she studied secretarial administration. Over the years she held jobs in Central City with the housing department, as well as at Charity Hospital. Following in her mother’s footsteps, she eventually started doing what she loved. She too began cooking for the New Orleans public schools and held that position for 25 years until Hurricane Katrina forced her to evacuate.

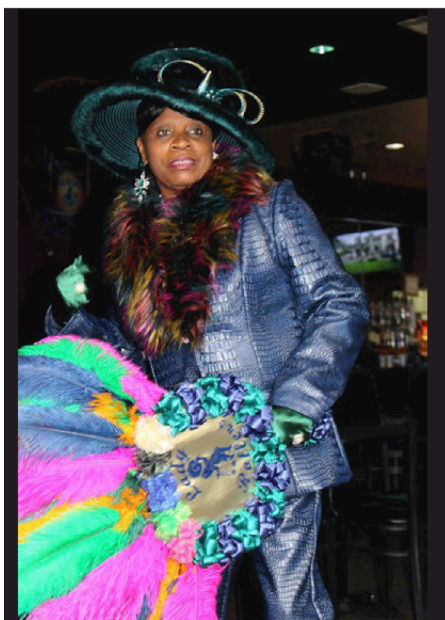
Upon her return to New Orleans, her mentor and friend, Adam Shipley, took Linda under his wing and put her to work cooking for the world-renowned music club, Tipitinas. It was at Tipitina’s that Linda served her unforgettable soul

food to the bands that performed there, both local and national. Though she has received countless awards, her pride comes from the satisfaction and happiness her food gives to others. Celebrities such as Kate Hudson, Bon Jovi, Robert Plant, Willie Nelson and Fats Domino are just a few she has had the honor to cook for.

Articles about “The Ya-Ka-Mein Lady” have been featured in numerous publications and she has also been a guest on many television productions. But people from all over the world probably know her best as the winner from the Food Network’s “Chopped,” Pride of New Orleans episode. She has appeared on the Travel Channel’s show “No Reservations” with the late Anthony Bourdain.

“Anthony traveled all over the world and he wanted to taste MY food. He said he had never tasted anything like it and that I should do something with it,” beamed Linda.

In her spare time Linda enjoys spearheading events with her club, “The Lady and Men Rollers.” Linda explained that the social aid and pleasure club was first started by her former husband, Anthony Holmes. It was originally an all-men’s club with the ladies participating annually in the court. Linda especially enjoys being a



PHOTOS CREDIT : HENRY YORK



parade marshal and handling the behind-the-scenes magic that goes into creating a parade.

When her marriage dissolved, Linda inherited the club and added women onto the roster. “My club is everything to me and I love my girls,” she said. “We all have a mutual love and respect for one another. We come together in one accord and we put on a hell of a show.”

Every year, after her turn coming out of the door, Linda rides on the back of a convertible for the duration of the procession. And she is always amazed by the masses of people that follow the line. To see the crowds dancing and so full of joy makes all of the hard work worth it to her, she proudly noted.

The Lady and Men Rollers traditionally parade on the last Sunday of the year but, due to the citywide COVID-19 restrictions, this year’s festivities have been put on hold. The club would have celebrated its 25th anniversary.

Linda stays busy featuring her delicious food at most of the major festivals and food events for which New Orleans is widely known. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced her to slow down for a bit, something she says, “I don’t know how to do.”

She has been enjoying spending time with her nine grandchildren and one



PHOTO COURTESY OF MS. LINDA

great-grandchild. You can meet the grandchildren nearly anytime you see Linda serving up her culinary delights. She is passing the legacy on to them and teaching them everything she knows about the business.

Her next project is bottling her unique seasoning for her award-winning take on the classic Bloody Mary cocktail, called the “Ya-Ka-Mary.” She is also working on getting local grocery stores to stock her Ya-Ka-Mein. Be sure to look for her in the near future as she partners with the Dragon’s Den (Esplanade Avenue at Frenchmen Street) to feature some of her classic, down-home cooking, hopefully during Phase 3 of the city’s reopening plans.

In those rare moments when she does take it easy, Linda enjoys watching old movies and is a self-proclaimed history buff. Linda dreams of traveling to Egypt where she can visit the Pyramids.

“I thought about becoming an anthropologist at one point, and maybe when the travel ban is lifted I can visit the dead kings. Now, that is something I would love to do.”

Maybe she can get the pharaohs to rise up for a yummy taste of her “Old Sober” Ya-Ka-Mein! 🍷