

Southern Foodways Alliance
Most Visited Places

S F A M V P

KENYATTA
ASHFORD'S

Chattanooga

I LIVED THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF MY LIFE in the Carrollton neighborhood of New Orleans, near Xavier University. As a boy, we moved over to Algiers. I came to Chattanooga in 2003, married my wife, Tomeka, and stayed to raise a family. This city is growing. Watch this town, and you can see the South change.

My new project, Neutral Ground, now part of a business incubator called Proof, is a neighborhood restaurant for serious food at a fair price that's not fussy. We focus on po-boys, yakamein, and specials that highlight the African diaspora. We plan to offer internships and scholarships to young people interested in the food industry.



Neutral Ground

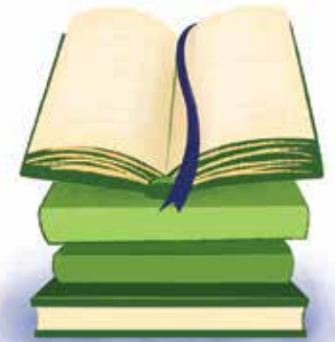
The name comes from my old Carrollton neighborhood in New Orleans. We would stand in the neutral ground to catch the streetcar or bus go by. The menu comes from my childhood, too. My uncle, Walter Dyer—he was my Paran (godfather)—drove taxis like my father, Leroy Ashford, still does. Uncle Walter would carry a bottle of Tabasco with him when he drove, to top off his yakamein. He loved that stuff.

Illustrations by Bridgette Blanton / Tiny Pencil Studio



Carniceria Loa #7

This is my spot. I come for ripe plantains and ripe avocados. It's the kind of place to buy chicken feet, liver, and hibiscus flowers to make tea. And when I shop, I eat their tacos. They serve lengua and carne asada, but I usually get the carnitas.



McKay's Books

It's a used bookstore with lots of cookbooks—lots of hidden gems. I can't promise you the same luck, but a friend of a friend bought a first edition of a James Beard cookbook here. For a really good price. And it was signed.



Morning Walk

I walk my neighborhood, Fort Cheatham, in the mornings, to see what's going on and for the exercise. It's full of working people. I recognize this neighborhood won't be like this for long. Gentrification is coming. When I walk, I see all kind of businesses—contractors, printers, building supply companies, plumbing companies, and more. And I wonder if the money they make stays in this neighborhood. I wonder if the people who own these businesses employ people in this neighborhood. Walk a neighborhood full of working people and you can learn a city.

This is the first in an ongoing digital and print series, underwritten by The Mountain Valley Spring Water.