

their native Michoacan and began opening *paleterías* (shops selling popsicles and ice cream) in Mexico City. Alcázar soon discovered he could make more money financing the *paleterías* of others than running them himself. He began lending money to Tocumbo natives who wanted to open ice cream stores. Decades later, an estimated 15,000 La Michoacana *paleterías* dot Mexico.

La Michoacana is not a corporation or franchise, but a very loose network of independent businesses with no central marketing, accounting, or advertising. La Michoacana ice cream is not a registered brand in Mexico. Anyone with an ice-cream maker and a storefront is free to use it. The *paletería* supply company in Tocumbo makes money selling equipment, ingredients, and marketing advice to entrepreneurs.

La Michoacana stores hit the United States around 1990. Proprietors like Gonzalez have adopted the La Michoacana name to gain name recognition with Mexican customers. “If you go to Mexico, there are more La Michoacanas than there are McDonald’s,” he says. “I get a lot of people from St. Louis and Little Rock. They say, ‘When I was a kid, my dad would send me to the ice cream store, and now I can come here.’”

Gonzalez’s first Memphis location, on busy Winchester Road, initially catered to a Mexican clientele. Now, Gonzalez says, “I’m surprised by the response we get at our other stores. It’s probably seventy percent American and thirty percent Mexican patrons.”

Buoyed by success, Gonzalez will open a fourth Memphis-area location and a new store in Nashville in 2013. More operators are getting in to the business, but Rodriguez is convinced he offers something that the start-up *paleterías* can’t touch.

“I won’t change from what I’m doing here. If I change, it won’t be La Michoacana.” The other guys, he says, will never be able to recreate the flavor of the La Michoacana recipes. Nor can they top the magic of the La Michoacana name. 🍷

---

*Mark Camarigg is the publications manager for Living Blues magazine at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture.*

# AN ORAL HISTORY CAKEWALK

*The sweetest stories behind the food*

*from the SFA oral history archives*

WE’VE BEEN COLLECTING the stories behind Southern food for a decade now. Our archive is filled with interviews about boudin and barbecue, catfish and kibbeh. It’s about time we offered you something for dessert. Here are a handful of sugary oral histories to satisfy your sweet tooth. You can always meet more bakers, confectioners, and sno-ball slingers at [southernfoodways.org](http://southernfoodways.org).





## EVA PERRY

*Tee Eva's Pralines and Pies, New Orleans, Louisiana*

*"Oh, I'm a sno-ball eater. I will eat the sno-ball with condensed milk, and the chocolate ice cream, with vanilla ice cream, with evaporated milk. I crumble up a fresh-cooked praline and mix it into my sno-ball, and then I'll put the praline flavor over it. It's awesome." —"Tee Eva" Perry*

EVA PERRY established Tee Eva's Pralines & Pies in 1989, when she was fifty-five years old. Watching chef Paul Prudhomme blacken redfish on television, she realized that she, too, had a culinary talent to market.

Eva learned her trade from a long line of country cooks. While she grew up in New Orleans, both sides of her family were bayou Creoles. Some of her best memories are of her aunt's lemon icebox pie and bread pudding; of making pralines with just-gathered pecans and brown sugar straight from the mill; and of the frozen treats she purchased for a penny from a Greek-owned store in her neighborhood. Eventually, she graduated to sno-balls.

In 2003 Eva passed Tee Eva's Pralines & Pies down to her granddaughter, Keonna Thornton Sykes. Eva hasn't retired, though. She still shaves ice and works the late shift at the shop.



## DEXTER WEAVER

*Weaver D's Delicious Fine Foods, Athens, Georgia*

*"Through the years we have improved the sweet potatoes, you know, adding different things. I add orange flavoring now along with the lemon and vanilla and nutmeg." —Dexter Weaver*

BORN IN ATHENS, GEORGIA, in 1954, Dexter Weaver grew up in Baltimore, Maryland, where he tended the garden at his family home and later catered from his mother's kitchen. When Dexter moved back to Athens in the early 1980s, he brought his culinary talents and entrepreneurial spirit with him, cooking for events and selling dinners from his home on the weekends. In 1986 he opened Weaver D's Delicious Fine Foods. The meat-and-three café quickly gained a reputation for its soul food, as well as for the unique personality of its owner.

Dexter Weaver has a way with words, and his trademark saying, "automatic for the people," pushed him into the limelight when the Athens-based band R.E.M. used the phrase as the title for their 1992 album. His sweet potato soufflé, while not technically a dessert, is so rich and sugary it might as well be.





## JOY PERRINE

*Jack's Lounge, Louisville, Kentucky*

*"There are the purists who say that bourbon should only be drunk straight or with a little splash of water; it shouldn't be in a cocktail. But there are a whole lot of people who just don't like the way bourbon tastes the first time they taste it, and these are the people I try to reach." —Joy Perrine*

JOY PERRINE COMES FROM a long line of bootleggers. In 1965 she moved to the Virgin Islands, where she got a job behind a bar and started experimenting. It was there that Joy learned about a local tradition of making guava-berry rum infusions, a technique she brought with her when she moved to Kentucky in 1978. Once in Louisville, Joy started making bourbon infusions, as well as innovative cocktails. Eventually, Joy began mixing drinks, first at Equus Restaurant, then next door at Jack's Lounge. Joy gets her menu ideas from cookbooks, encounters with new ingredients, and her own memories of a place or a time. 🍷

PHOTOS, PAGE 13–14 by Sara Roahen.

PHOTOS, PAGE 15–16 by Amy C. Evans.

## MADE FROM SCRATCH

*In Knoxville, Dale Mackey serves fried pies with a side of girl power*

*by Jed Portman*

