



Besh Steakhouse

# *bigger slice of the pie*

**High-profile chefs using cachet to open new restaurants in the face of poor economy**

**By Brett Anderson**  
Restaurant writer

This past July, chef John Besh of Restaurant August cut the ribbon on the Besh Steakhouse, a new restaurant inside Harrah's New Orleans Casino. All modern steakhouses of any merit are forums for conspicuous consumption, but Besh's ups the ante.

Its walls are adorned with giant, original George Rodrigue paintings. Its menu includes beluga caviar, along with several items priced at more than \$40. The bone-in ribeye weighs in at 30 ounces and \$45.

Last month, chefs Rene Bajeux and Richard "Bingo" Starr celebrated the opening of La Côte Brasserie in the luxe new Renaissance Arts Hotel,

just down the street from Harrah's. It's a sleek, sophisticated seafood restaurant, with a curved raw bar offering imported oysters for up to three times what the local ones go for on Bourbon Street.

These are hardly the signs of a restaurant industry crippled by what service industry professionals around the country have been referring to as the "perfect storm" — an economic disaster created by a drooping economy, a historic terrorist attack inside U.S. borders followed by wars overseas and, for a time anyway, the SARS scare.

The climate has not put people in a mood to dine out, especially not on fish eggs at \$120 per ounce. Serious restaurants in major cities around the country have been closing.

Except in New Orleans, where restaurateurs seem to be celebrating the perfect storm as a clear and sunny day. As the city enters the meat of the hurricane season, more ambitious restaurants are opening or scheduled to open than at any time since the height of the stock market boom.

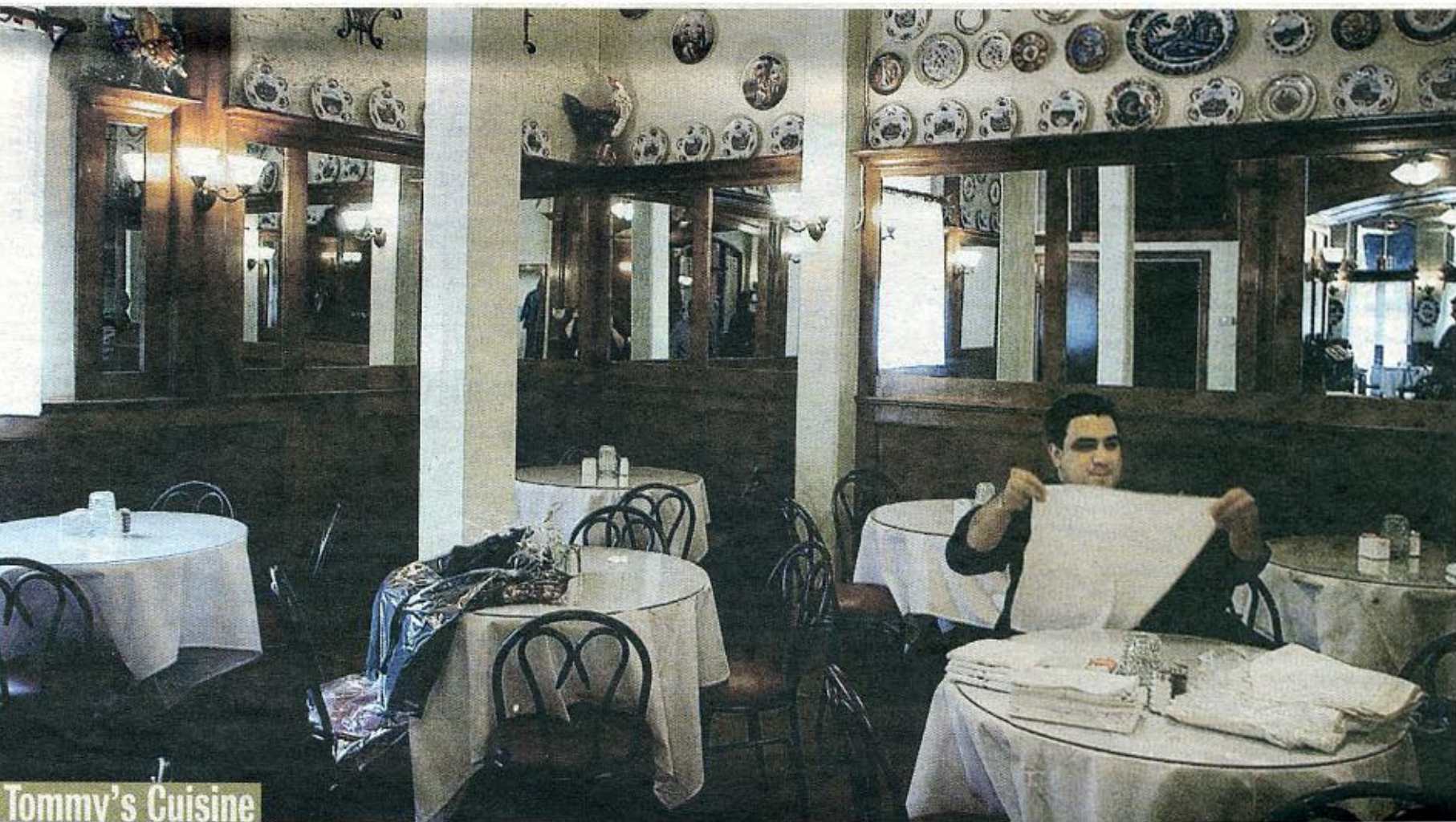
Just a few steps away from La Côte is Tommy's Cuisine, a handsomely renovated restaurant that started serving old-school Italian and Galatoire's-style Creole food just a few weeks ago.

Meanwhile, Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group is in the throes of an expensive renovation to a build-

See **RESTAURANTS**, Page 22



La Côte Brasserie



Tommy's Cuisine