

Press release written on opening of Los Angeles restaurant for Wagstaff Worldwide P.R.
by Amy C. Quick

FOR: MR. CECIL'S CALIFORNIA RIBS
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(LOS ANGELES; January 2003) – The search for California-style ribs is over. Mr. Cecil's California Ribs is about to turn an unassuming stretch of the San Fernando Valley's Ventura Boulevard into rib-lovers heaven, thanks to the vision—and appetite—of film producer Jonathan Burrows.

A quest to find perfect beef ribs led to Burrows' unlikely foray into the Los Angeles restaurant industry. In 2000 he opened the first location of Mr. Cecil's on Pico Boulevard. "Before I opened the restaurant, every city I went to I tasted their barbecue," Burrows recalls. "I found some good baby backs, but I never found good beef ribs." His leap of faith in Californians' desire for their own brand of barbecue proved to be right on. The public ate up Mr. Cecil's charming atmosphere as quickly as they ate up the ribs; the restaurant was forced to close its doors for two days to replenish its stock of food.

The newest Mr. Cecil's has a warm, light-hearted feel, decorated with whimsical cows, pigs, and tin sculptures. Movie set designer Deren Abram worked with Burrows to play up the quirky look of a down-home barbecue shack, while maintaining an upscale edge. Diners enter the restaurant through the covered front patio, featuring windows that can be opened in good weather, and a humorous cow bench positioned beside a pig in a hammock. The main dining room surrounds an island bar with stone countertops and a water-tower sculpture beneath a TV. Bar patrons, and diners seated nearby, can plug in headsets if they wish to hear the TV. Exposed-beam ceilings and a brick wall lend an air of rustic charm which envelops the tasteful blond-wood tabletops and red Naugahyde banquette. An exhibition kitchen is located in the back.

Burrows oversees the kitchens of both Mr. Cecil's locations. He learned to cook during his bachelor years, bringing dates home to enjoy his culinary experiments. His formal culinary training includes a course in West Hollywood, though it is mainly his lifelong passion for ribs that has inspired Mr. Cecil's inventive menu. Burrows' wife, Annie, is responsible for 20 percent of the restaurant's recipes and lends a Southern-Cajun influence. It was Annie who came up with the idea of using Burrows' father's nickname, Mr. Cecil, and cartoon image for the restaurant. Burrows shares restaurant ownership with brother Kenneth Burrows and his wife, Erica Jong; friend and fellow movie-industry executive Larry Jackson; and cousin James Burrows, television executive.

The menu at the newest Mr. Cecil's features the same favorites as the West Los Angeles location, four kinds of ribs that lay down the rules for a specific style of California barbecue. A slight Asian influence gives the ribs an edge other regions can't lay claim to, a flavor of East meets West. The signature beef ribs and the baby backs are the mainstay of the Mr. Cecil's menu. Baby backs are the biggest seller but Burrows is especially proud of his beef ribs. "Most people have this idea that ribs are hard, chewy, tasteless," he says. "I have to cajole them to taste the ribs and, more often than not, they're hooked."

Also popular are the St. Louis ribs and the short ribs dinner, served with fries and coleslaw for \$19.95. The ribs are available in full-rack, half-rack, and one-third-rack portions, and are backed by a variety of side items which give a nod to traditional Southern cuisine. Choose from corn bread, coleslaw, hushpuppies with butter and honey, or barbecue baked beans with bacon. Other sides include Cajun hot links for \$4.50, flame-grilled vegetable kabob for \$3.75, and grilled corn with chili lime butter for \$2.50.

The entrée menu continues with a smoked tri-tip steak dinner, a 9–10-ounce choice cut of steak smoked and flame grilled, for \$17.95; Mr. Cecil's Burger, a half pound of beef on a sandwich-sized English muffin for \$7.95; a catfish dinner for \$9.95; and flame-grilled vegetable kabobs with eggplant, squash, and grilled onions for \$9.95. A new item on the menu is steak au poivre, steak with peppercorn sauce which Burrows learned to make in

Paris. A variety of sandwich specialties for \$7.95–10.95 round out the entrée choices. Choose from a menu of mouth-watering starters, including catfish nuggets with Cajun-cocktail or tartar sauce for \$5.25, buffalo wings for \$6.95, Mr. Cecil’s chili for \$2.95, and the exclusive Mr. Cecil’s California salsa served with corn chips for \$2.95.

A skylighted back room and bar may be rented out for private parties of up to 50, and also serves as overflow seating. The restaurant hosts musical entertainers, spotlighting Julie London–style torch singers and bands. On a regular basis, children will be invited to participate in young-artist pig-drawing contests, with the results displayed in front of the kitchen. During special promotions, the restaurant’s official car will make appearances. A 1959 Fiat Jolly, the comic Mr. Cecilmobile features rattan upholstery, a surrey-fringed top, and a front that looks remarkably like a smile. Mr. Cecil’s take-out food is unusually and elegantly presented in double-shoebox–sized boxes, proof that nothing about this take on the traditional ribs joint is traditional.

Enjoy the full Mr. Cecil’s menu daily from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.