

# Downtown With Neely

Acclaimed chef regales fans at 'Eat and Greet'

BY CHANEL DAVIS  
THE CHRONICLE

Early last Thursday morning, Sweet Potatoes was filled with the smell of home cooking, the sound of forks scraping plates and laughter, as several dozen lucky patrons listened to television personality and chef Pat Neely describe the memories behind some of his favorite dishes.

The downtown restaurant and the nonprofit literacy promotion organization Bookmarks hosted the "Eat and Greet," where fans – or friends, as Neely calls them – got a chance to chat with the chef and enjoy a breakfast menu compiled of recipes from "Back Home with The Neelys: Comfort Food from Our Southern Kitchen to Yours," a cookbook penned by Neely and his wife, Gina.

"Friends are going to get somewhat of the same down home flair of good southern, savory comfort food, but they are also going to get some incredible stories about the history of Pat and Gina when they were first introduced to the kitchen," Neely promised.

The Neelys book includes classic recipes that have been passed down through generations, including strawberry jam, crunchy fried okra, Brunswick stew, chocolate cake and skillet cornbread.

The Sweet Potatoes staff used the book to make the food for the breakfast event – a fundraiser for Bookmarks.

"It is always good to meet other people who do what we do and do it well –



Photos by Chanel Davis



Pat Neely chats with fans last Thursday morning at Sweet Potatoes.

Left: Pat Neely poses with Sweet Potatoes owners Vivian Joiner (left) and Stephanie Tyson.

bring something that is fun, exciting, knowledgeable, supportive and creative to the audience. We are going to continue to work hard, be positive role models, be encouraging and supportive, hopefully opening doors for others."

The day before the breakfast, Neely was the subject of a public Q&A at the Arts Council Theatre. Also last Thursday, he signed copies of the new book during the Twin City Rib Fest. Proceeds from his appearances will help Bookmarks hold its annual Festival of Books and other local programs.

"It is wonderful to have him here. It is exciting for us for a lot of reasons because we are so interested in connecting authors with readers," said Ginger Hendricks, executive director at Bookmarks. "That is our mission. It is wonderful for us to bring someone, first, of his stature, but someone who can show how literature and writing is related to culinary arts."

successfully," said Sweet Potatoes co-owner Vivian Joiner. "He seems like a really nice guy, down to earth and most importantly he enjoys food. It is a real treat to have him come in."

The Neelys host a popular show on The Food Network, "Down Home with the Neelys," and have released several other cookbooks, including "Down Home with the Neelys: A Southern Family Cookbook" and "The Neelys' Celebration Cookbook: Down Home Meals for Every Occasion." The couple recently opened their first restaurant in Manhattan.

Miguel Langford, a frequent Sweet Potatoes diner, said he came across the event online and researched Neely.

"He brought me back home," Langford said of Neely's recipes. "I was raised by my grandmother, and once I saw the title 'Down Home,' that was all I needed to hear. I really enjoyed myself and it is a good feeling to think about my grandmother and this food."

Neely has recently signed with North Carolina-based Family Dollar to help the company launch a line of quality food products. He said he doesn't know exactly what else the future holds for him and Gina, but is sure it will be food-related.

"This industry is always changing, so you have no idea where you are going to be," he said. "I do know that I want to be encouraging to others and

# Boone remembered as advocate for the black press

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

Raymond "Ray" Boone, the venerable and dapper founding editor and publisher of the Richmond Free Press, was laid to rest Tuesday in Chesterfield County, Va.

Boone died Tuesday, June 3 after a battle with pancreatic cancer. He was 76.

A military veteran, Boone was a journalist for more than 60 years. He spent some of that time as a White House correspondent. Boone saw himself as continuation of the legacy of his journalistic hero, John Mitchell Jr., the "fighting editor" of the Richmond Planet who carried pistols and dared white supremacists to lynch him for writing about the injustices of his day.

A true believer in the First Amendment and the U.S. Constitution, Boone vigorously championed democratic values, with an emphasis on justice and equality for all, never forgetting the harsh segregation he dealt with growing up in his native Suffolk.

As one of his admirers put it, "he was the undisputed, undefeated heavyweight champion of journalistic pugilism." And he was active at the Free Press until the very end.

"He knew what was going on," said his daughter, Regina H. Boone. "He was talking about what the



Boone

headlines should be for the May 29 edition."

Boone built the newspaper into one of the largest weekly newspapers in the state and strived for lively reporting and strong opinions. He was involved in a variety of crusades. He named his longest running campaign "Vote with your dollars," to encourage readers to use their spending power to reward companies that catered to them and to punish those that didn't.

He also sought to brighten the city during the winter with his "Love Lights" campaign. Boone also pushed, poked and prodded his governors, legislators, mayors and council members to do more business with Black-owned and minority firms.

Boone also leaves behind his wife of 47 years, Jean Patterson Boone; his son, Raymond H. Boone Jr.; grandson, Raymond H. Boone III; and a host of other family members and friends.

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