



DIBS ON THE RIBS!

Just call him the Mayor of Market Street. That's what linebacker-huge Shawn Jones of hot spot **Jasper's** (9595 Six Pines Dr., Ste. 900, 281.298.6600) has dubbed himself. The friendly manager, a Katrina survivor who had just fulfilled a dream of opening his own restaurant when the hurricane changed his plans, works the house in his trademark pinstripe suits. He warmly greets regulars at the three-year-old mainstay that shows little sign of slowing, even as more and more good restaurants pop up in Montgomery County.

Barbecued pork tenderloin, crab cakes, prime rib and "the secret

weapon," smoked-for-hours baby back ribs (called out by *Bon Appetit* as some of the country's best) are all hot sellers. This is the "gourmet backyard cuisine," as Jones calls it, that helped make Jasper's a smash all over Texas. (There are also locations in Plano and the trendy Domain district in Austin, and San Antonio's is forthcoming.)

There's a comforting energy in the place to match the menu. Owner and James Beard nominee Kent Rathbun, who also owns the socialite favorite **Abacus** in Dallas, keeps staff on for years, nurturing their other talents. The paintings in the bar area in The Woodlands' Jasper's are the work of Abacus servers. The rustically elegant two-story Market Street anchor bustles throughout the day—two patios in front fill with shoppers taking a break, and business types meeting for lunch—and at night a well-dressed young crowd dines by firelight in the main dining room where an exposed kitchen allows the smell of home cooking to drift in. Jones says patrons drive in from Sugar Land, Pearland, Magnolia and, of course, Houston. And they'll be greeted by the "mayor" every time.

