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A la carte for the heart — and soul

At the South Macon Diner, where a banner welcomes patrons to come on in for “Home Cooking and Diabetic Meals,” oxtail and beer liver simmer in serving trays on the soul food line. The healthier stuff — chicken picatta, apple-cherry-glazed pork chops, basil pork and green beans — are cooked to order for sugar-conscious customers. Restaurant owner Roosevelt Braswell knows it may take some time for the wholesome items to catch on. “Diabetic meals costs more to make,” he said. “By selling more of the other meals, we’re able to sell the diabetic meals at the same price.” Braswell opened the restaurant on Houston Avenue last month. A diabetic for the past 12 years, he understands the frustration of trying to eat right when eating out. “I got tired of going to all these other places and most of them could not get it right. I’ve driven through a drive-through as many as three times to get a sandwich right.” Braswell’s motives, however, are as much selfless as selfish. He lost two aunts to diabetes-related health problems and his father, also a diabetic, died of a heart attack six years ago. “I wish I could have opened up then, while he was alive. He could have had somewhere to come while he was alive. There are a lot of people who are diabetic. If they could find a place to eat right, they would eat right.” The restaurant is open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays, so Braswell and his wife, Rachel, have worked long hours in getting the business rolling. She prepares most of the diabetic meals and Braswell cooks up the soul food. “I came up in a family of 13. We all had to learn to

cook at a young age,” he said. Riley Duncan, who runs an auto detail shop down the street, said the restaurant at 3297 Houston Ave. is a good thing for the neighborhood. He had been driving to Pio Nono Avenue for lunch. “It’s walking distance,” he said. “I’ve been here every day.” Duncan said he has to watch what he eats because of blood-sugar issues, but admits that when he “feels good” he orders from the soul food menu. “If I feel bad, I go back to the diabetic,” he said. The restaurant is Roosevelt Braswell’s first venture into the food business. His wife has some experience, but only on the customer service side. “Other than waiting on tables,” she said, “this is all new.” Despite “working day and night,” she said she has not grown tired of working with her husband. Roosevelt Braswell operated a car audio shop on Pio Nono Avenue that was destroyed in the Mother’s Day tornado two years ago. Later, he worked briefly for Georgia Power Co. until he was sidelined with a rotator cuff tear, he said. Recently, he watched a couple escort into the diner an elderly man who could “hardly walk.” Braswell saw it as confirmation of his decision to open the restaurant. “It makes me feel good when I see the older customers. Those are the people I want to see, older people who can’t cook for themselves, who want to eat right,” he said.