

# The Times

## Upscale cafe

*Editors note: A Business Of My Own is a new monthly feature exploring the challenges of entrepreneurship.*

**By J.L. Scott**  
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Matthew Linn, 37, of Shreveport took a big risk a year ago when he opened Columbia Cafe on the corner of Kings Highway and Creswell Avenue in the Highland neighborhood.

He'd never run a restaurant before, and had invested nearly \$1 million over eight years to renovate the property. But he wanted to stay open early and

**A Business of My Own** late for neighborhood

residents, especially medical students and college students.

Since then he's learned how to keep costs down, give customers what they want and stay true to his own standards.

"I went into business to offer the same level of high-quality food and customer service that I want," Linn said.

"It's all about feeling comfortable. We have linen napkins but no tablecloths because we want people to feel comfortable and enjoy their dining experience."

Columbia Cafe offers a limited menu that changes frequently based on what's in season. One recent dinner entree: Beef Bragirole stuffed with eggplant caviar.

Linn started out offering fresh pastries with his specialty coffees. But demand dropped for the sweet treats and he was giving away hundreds of dollars of the product weekly to local schools.

He now offers Albert Uster Chocolates, a line of Swiss chocolates that seems to draw regular patrons. This one product change taught Linn a valuable lesson: Customers dictate the product, not the other way around.

Other challenges have included limited parking,



Greg Pearson/The Times

Rebecca Bush prepares Jicama and oranges for two dishes to be served at a party at Columbia Cafe on the corner of Kings Highway and Creswell Avenue.

which forced him to add 20 additional spaces behind the restaurant for overflow, and trying to price his upscale menu so that customers can afford it.



Linn

"The most pleasurable part of being in business has been the customers," Linn said.

### AT A GLANCE

**Business:** Columbia Cafe LLC

**Owner:** Matthew Linn

**Founded:** Sept. 15, 2002

**Employs:** 20

**Hours:** Tuesday-Friday 7 a.m.-10 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m.-10 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

**Phone:** 425-3862