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TOP STORY

Restaurateur's road led from South Sudan to Buffalo

Andrew Galarneau

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Akec Aguer, chef and owner of Nile River, a new South Sudanese restaurant at the West Side Bazaar.

Derek Gee

Andrew Galarneau

The Nile River is the longest waterway on the planet, but Akec Aguer's path to opening his first restaurant was longer yet.

Aguer is the chef and owner of Nile River, a new South Sudanese restaurant at the West Side Bazaar, which he runs with his son, Garang Doar.

His professional cooking journey began in South Sudan, in 1995, feeding Canadian oilfield workers in Khartoum.



Garang Doar delivers freshly prepared orders to the counter at Nile River, a new South Sudanese restaurant at the West Side Bazaar.

Derek Gee

In August, his dill-laced beef kebabs, ful fava bean stew and fried beef-and-dill turnovers were available at the bazaar's 25 Grant St. food court.

In between, Aguer survived a civil war that reached into his restaurant kitchen, and later learned Egyptian ways cooking in Cairo.



Sambusas at Nile River are crispy deep-fried pastries stuffed with beef and dill.

Derek Gee

In the United States, he worked as a security guard and Uber driver while working on the foundations of his restaurant.

“I had to train myself,” he said. “So I went to ECC to learn English, and took an associate's degree in hospitality management.” He also got a degree from SUNY Buffalo State, where he told his adviser he wanted to open a restaurant.

He applied to the Westminster Economic Development Initiative’s West Side Bazaar in 2017.



Kofta kebab at Nile River, a new South Sudanese restaurant at the West Side Bazaar, is a grilled beef-and-dill burger over salad.

Derek Gee

Between the pandemic and other issues, the delays stretched into years. Tired of the delay, Aguer decided to move to Wisconsin, and started working there.

There, the call reached him: His spot was ready. So he came back, and opened his place.

His cooking is not classic South Sudanese, he said, but his versions of some of his favorite dishes. The emphasis on fresh dill – present in kebabs, samosas and the collard greens, beef and dill stew called sukuma wiki – he picked up while working in Cairo.



Sukuma wiki is a collard greens, beef and dill stew at Nile River, a new South Sudanese restaurant at the West Side Bazaar.

Derek Gee

Next year, when the West Side Bazaar moves to its expanded space on Niagara Street, Aguer plans to expand his menu, too, if he can.

“I have a lot of foods that I want to put it all in,” he said. “When we move next year, I will have more than that, because I know so many.”

The name of his restaurant hints at the dream that motivates him.

“The reason I named it Nile River is because it crosses 10 countries in Africa,” he said. “These 10, if I know their food, I can make it the right way.”



Ful at Nile River, a new South Sudanese restaurant at the West Side Bazaar, is made of fava beans, tomatoes, garlic and other spices, topped with fresh cheese and hard-boiled egg.

Derek Gee

“It starts from Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, Egypt. These are 10 countries that share this, this Nile that is feeding them.”

Perhaps if Nile River catches on in Buffalo, it will give other hoped-for developments a chance, he said.



Garang Doar and his father own Nile River, a new South Sudanese restaurant at the West Side Bazaar. Doar prepares a dish on the stove that is shared by a few restaurants who use the space.

Derek Gee

“If this one is successful, I told my son, I’m thinking we move to make our own bakery,” Aguer said. “It needs to be done because we have our community here, and they do not have a Sudanese bakery.”

When the restaurant is secure, he said, that’s next.

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(West Side Bazaar, 25 Grant St., is open 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday; 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Order online through **West Side Bazaar's Facebook page.**)

Send restaurant tips to agalarneau@buffnews.com and follow @BuffaloFood on Instagram and Twitter.

Andrew Galarneau

Food editor

I am on a mission to find the best new sensations and old favorites. Send me a note and tell me about that dish I ought not to miss. I know I know nothing without my readers, who give me the clues to the buried treasure.