

After Hollywood, down-home cooking



INSIDE STORIES

A.J.
CARTER

Leisa Dent says she doesn't remember Eddie Murphy's favorite dish, but she thinks it was broccoli casserole. If that's the case, she must be some cook.

In the early 1980s, Dent spent two years cooking for the comedian-actor, with whom she graduated from Roosevelt High School in 1979. "People would come over to my house and eat, or I'd bring stuff to school — a lot of cakes, mostly," she said of her high school years.

A few years later, Dent said, "one of our mutual friends tracked me down" and got her to talk with Murphy, who was beginning to make it big, about being his personal chef. "He wanted traditional foods, and he wanted somebody he could trust," she said. Dent said she cooked for Murphy at his home in Englewood, N.J., and in Hollywood, feeding not only him but



Leisa Dent, left, once Eddie Murphy's personal chef, and her mother, Lillian, in their new Westbury restaurant, LL Dent

his entourage. "He was a good person to work for. I respected him, and we were cool."

Eventually, though, the round-the-clock Hollywood lifestyle

got to her — "a little too much for somebody who was trying to find Jesus," she said. The final straw came one Sunday when she was trying to take off after

leaving a turkey dinner for Murphy; the entourage ate it before he got home, and she had to face an angry celebrity. "I made another meal, but I was getting burnt out by the lifestyle."

Dent enrolled at the Culinary Institute of America and began a career in the food industry that took its latest turn a couple of weeks ago when she and her mother, Lillian, opened a home-style Southern-flair restaurant, LL Dent, in Westbury. Unlike what she said are Long Island's typical soul food eateries, hers is a place where you sit down rather than take out.

Broccoli casserole is not on the menu, although when we expressed some skepticism about the dish, Dent said, "You'd like mine. . . . This is the key point about me: Every time somebody says, 'I wouldn't eat that,' when they taste something I make and it has that in it, they're now into it."

So maybe we'd try her broccoli casserole. Her spicy chicken soup with okra may be a harder sell.

THE TICKER

BROWNIE POINTS. We witnessed a payoff the other day, but before you call the nearest prosecutor, listen to Rep. Steve Israel's defense. Israel (D-Dix Hills) was instrumental in obtaining \$1.5 million in federal funds for some road improvements in Syosset, and Laura Schultz, from the Residents for a Beautiful Syosset, showed up at last week's Long Island Association congressional seminar to deliver the quid

for Israel's quo: a container of home-baked brownies. Israel freely admitted that this was only

the latest installment in the funding payoffs, but even combined, the value of the bribes did not exceed the



Laura Schultz