

Des Moines Register

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Section: Business**Page:** 1D**Restaurant rolls back prices to celebrate its 40th year***Ryberg William
Staff*

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REGISTER BUSINESS WRITER

The Giudicessi family is celebrating its 40th anniversary as the owner of Christopher's restaurant with 1960s prices.

Spaghetti dinners for \$1.75, prime rib for \$3.25 and fried chicken for \$2.25 have been a hit with customers, said B.J. Giudicessi, the general manager. Lines have stretched out the door and around the Des Moines restaurant despite the winter chill.

"It's been fun," said Giudicessi. "We're just trying to thank people for 40 years."

Joe Giudicessi, B.J.'s father, purchased the restaurant in February 1963. Joe ran the restaurant his wife, Evelyn, "Red," kept the books.

The restaurant at 2816 Beaver Ave. has become a landmark in the Beavertdale neighborhood, said Jeff Watts, owner of Bond's of Beavertdale, a clothing store across the street. "They've been bringing customers to Beavertdale for 40 years."

Christopher's gives diners white tablecloths and cloth napkins with a relaxed atmosphere, the owners say.

"We have people come in suits. We have people come in jeans," B.J. Giudicessi said. Dinner prices -2003-style -range from \$6.50 to \$30.

The restaurant almost got a name change in 1963.

New owner Joe Giudicessi called a sign maker about changing "Christopher's" -spelled out on a big marquee-style sign with a neon outline of a martini glass -to "Giudicessi's." The price, however, was \$283.

"At that time, it was a lot of money," Joe Giudicessi, now 73, recalled.

"Well," he decided then, "Christopher's has got a good ring to it. I'll just leave it Christopher's," the name of a previous owner.

Longtime customer Bob Walker likes the food, the atmosphere and the service. "They bend over backward to make sure you're happy."

Joe and Red Giudicessi are now semiretired. Daughter Rene oversees the dining room and serving staff. Another son, Ron, is general manager of Mezzodi's, a south-side restaurant owned by the family.

Joe Giudicessi ran Rose's Cafe on Des Moines' east side from 1953 until 1960, when the building was destroyed by a fire. A city ordinance about alley access prevented rebuilding as a restaurant. He sold aluminum products for three years before getting back into the restaurant business. In 1963, Christopher's seated about 30 people in the dining area and 14 in the bar. Now the restaurant seats nearly 400 in three dining rooms, a bar and a banquet room. The restaurant has 62 employees.

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Secrets to success include excellent food and service and competitive prices, Joe Giudicessi said.

The key, however, is getting to know customers by name and personally greeting them, he said.

Christopher's

LOCATION: 2816 Beaver Ave., Des Moines

DINNER: 5-10 p.m. Monday through Thursday 5-11 p.m. Friday and Saturday closed Sunday

OWNERS: The Giudicessi family, observing their 40th year of ownership this month

EMPLOYEES: 62

SEATING: Room for nearly 400 in three dining rooms, a bar and a banquet room

PHONE: (515) 274-3694

Anniversary specials

The Giudicessi family decided to mark Christopher's 40th anniversary with 40-year-old menu prices on one item each evening Monday through Thursday during the final two weeks of February.

The bargains expand this Wednesday when the restaurant will feature its entire 1963 menu at 1963 prices. Some examples include:

* Prime rib dinner, \$3.25, compared to the 2003 price of \$16.95.

* Fried chicken dinner, \$2.25, instead of \$9.95.

Reservations for Wednesday are filled, but some space is available for walk-ins. A wait is likely.

Photo_By: GARY FANDEL/THE REGISTER: Lots of memories: Members of the Giudicessi family sort through 40 years of photographs related to their restaurant, Christopher's, at 2816 Beaver Ave. in Des Moines. Seated are daughter, Rene, left, and parents, Evelyn and Joe and standing are sons B.J., left, and Ron.

Photo_By: MARY CHIND/THE REGISTER: Order up: Waitress Diane Harrington has worked at Christopher's for 19 years. The Des Moines restaurant is celebrating its 40th anniversary this week.

Photos:

Christopher's in 1967 . . .

. . . in the early 1970s . . .

. . . and today

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