

RESTAURATEUR

Official Publication of the Western New York Chapter of the New York State Restaurant Association

SERVING • ALLEGANY, CATTARAUGUS, CHAUTAUQUA, ERIE, GENESEE, NIAGARA, ORLEANS AND WYOMING COUNTIES

Volume 10 - Number 7

September 2010

Local Restaurant Week Oct.4th-10th



Chef Andrew Nuernberger of the ROY-CROFT gets preparations under way



Jim Guarino SHANGO is stocking up on fresh veggies for Local Restaurant Week.

photo: Bill Wippert - Buffalo News

Why \$20.10?

When we first launched local restaurant week, we wanted to develop a price point as part of our marketing strategy to mobilize the public to identify with the event. The public overwhelmingly bought in. It has become the signature calling card for the week, and in such a short time, it has enabled us to catapult this promotion into a critical mass of consumers.

Can I offer deals higher or lower than \$20.10?

Absolutely. In fact we encourage it. Your obligation is to offer ONE dining package for \$20.10. Last September, many operators offered packages for \$30.09 and \$40.09 and did great business. Some offered lesser value packages as a strategy to build check averages. You know what price points and what deals work best for you. We want to give you flexibility and latitude to make your offer as appealing and profitable for your restaurant.

Why do I pay a registration fee?

Your registration fee is used to maintain LocalRestaurantWeek.com and to help defray the costs associated with organizing the event and the media outreach. Over 750,000 unique visitors have used LocalRestaurantWeek.com since it was launched last March.

How can I maximize my profits for the Week?

1. Register early and post your specials to the website. Consumers look to the website to make their dining choices for the week.
2. Prepare a Local Restaurant Week specials menu where you have all of your offers, whether they are lower or higher than \$20.10.
3. Staff and train your people to embrace the event to increase profits and future business.
4. Leverage your existing marketing practices and get the word out to your customers about your plans for Local Restaurant Week.

Local RestaurantWeek WNY media guide can be found by visiting: http://westernnewyork.localfoodservice.com/apps/lrw/media_center.cfm



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Back to School – Education for \$\$\$

Welcome back! (to the newsletter, that is). It's that time of the year again. After what can only be described as an awesome summer in terms of the weather, the seasons change and so do the habits of much of our industry's clientele. Whether your establishment or business thrives during the summer months or starts to ramp



Robert Free

up again once they are over, there is no denying the fact that the spending trends of people do change heading into the next couple of months. Knowing your clientele is half the battle – learning whom you CAN draw as clientele is even more important.

No doubt that the economy is better than it was this time last year, but the jury is still out on which way it actually is headed. 'Trepidation' is a word many students will surely learn this year when they return for their classes, and for us in the industry, it is a word we must heed carefully. There is still that feeling of trepidation out there amongst our customers regarding the economy and this directly affects their discretionary spending. Which makes it vitally important that, as a business, you are utilizing everything in your power to reach out to new customers as well as retaining those you already have. Sometimes, this means re-learning the basics: service, menu options, and pricing. Whatever you decide to do, it is important to continue educating yourself on what options are available to increase the all important head count!

Know that your food/bev vendors are willing to help you with server training, menu re-design, and new product development. More so, know that as a member of the WNY Chapter of NYSRA there are a myriad of opportunities that are offered that can help you to better your business! The Association can be your resource for cost savings on services, or as a liaison with vendors, organizations, and governmental agencies.

For instance, on Monday, Sept. 20th the chapter will be hosting, in tandem with Access Buffalo, another Disability Awareness Training Seminar at Pettibones Grille from 10 – 2. This free seminar (includes lunch) is designed to educate restaurateurs on how to better serve those with disabilities. There is a huge untapped market for establishments that are simply willing to learn what can be done to make themselves accessible to all.

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Being a Member of NYSRA is Good as Gold!

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Please note that this information is provided to you for general informational purposes only, and should not be relied upon for personal, medical, legal or financial decisions. You should consult an appropriate and qualified professional for specific advice tailored to your particular situation.
Melissa A. Fleischut - Director of Government Affairs - New York State Restaurant Association



STRAIGHT AHEAD

FRED G. SAMPSON, PRESIDENT ~ SAMPSON CONSULTING, INC.

Customer Objections, and What is Fine Dining?

When I sit down to write these columns, I'm mindful that most if not all of those who read it are knowledgeable industry operators. As a result, some of what I write may not seem new; however, in light of various articles and comments that I read and hear, what I'm writing about would still seem to apply. For instance.....

Would you believe that a major customer complaint by both sexes is being addressed as "you guys," as in "How are you guys?" or "Are you guys ready to order?" That was the No. 1 gripe in a poll dealing with customers' pet peeves conducted by Sylvia Rector of the Detroit Free Press. This topped slow service, improperly cooked food and mixed-up orders. I, for one, am not surprised. Over the years, I have heard and written about the many adverse comments this type of greeting generates. For example, a woman being offended at being called a guy and a man informing the server that the person with him was a lady, not a guy. Not a very nice way to start out a guest-server relationship.

Another perhaps well-intended action by servers is asking guests, "Do you need change?" when they pick up a check with cash. According to Ms. Rector's poll, diners considered it presumptuous or thought it was an attempt to get an extra-large tip, so they left less in protest. Many servers will tell you that they're only trying to avoid an unnecessary trip back to the table. One respondent suggested that the server might say, "I'll return with your change," which invites the guest to say, "We are all set."

The remaining "gripes" were:

No. 3: checks brought to the table too soon, making guests feel as though they were being rushed.

No. 4: wiping down tables and chairs with the same dirty cloth all over the dining room, and it must be common, because so many diners described the same scene.

No. 5: loud background music and other noises.

No. 6: parents who let children run loose, shriek and make a mess.

No. 7: overly familiar servers who squat down or bend or sit beside customers.

No. 8: clearing dishes while some guests are still eating.

No. 9: being seated in an undesirable location for no reason.

And finally, courses that arrive too quickly.

continued page 4

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Sampson Continued...

None of these customer gripes is new, and that is the disturbing aspect of polls such as this. The same consumer complaints continue to be taking place, and they are not limited to casual dining or quick-service operations. Based on the reviews I have read, which includes the press, magazines, blogs and the Internet, they are happening industry-wide. While still not acceptable, one could understand it during the recent industry boom--more customers than seats, a critical shortage of experienced staff, every empty retail space becoming a food-service establishment. Those conditions no longer exist; therefore, it's puzzling to understand why the industry in general is still not meeting guests' expectations when it comes to service.

I fully understand that every operation for the most part has some type of training regime; however, wouldn't it be great if some qualified person would develop a "basic training program" that dealt with customer relations, where instructors could point out the importance of positive interaction with consumers. This, for all intents and purposes, could apply to any retail business.

Dealing with the public is never an easy task; it is particularly more difficult in these troublesome and uncertain times. Tension, stress and worry are all in abundance; therefore, it takes a real effort to successfully please today's patrons.

It would seem that management must emphasize to its waitstaff the importance of maintaining a positive attitude in an extremely negative environment; it makes for improved customer relations and increased earnings.

I Would Like to Hear from You Re Fine Dining

There is a major discussion taking place among food writers, critics and consultants in the industry relating to the term "fine dining." It seems that many aspects of our culture are being described as casual, including fine dining. Some purists maintain that this is a contradiction and that "fine dining" denotes a more formal environment.

What is your definition of "fine dining?" I would appreciate your e-mailing your comments on this question.

Comments can be sent to redgsampson@juno.com

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George Schaeffer

Bailey Fire Hose Picnic

The summer of 1961 proved to be memorable. At Erie County Technical Institute, I had a year of hands-on experience and liked the fast paced action of the food business. I especially enjoyed the catering events that we did throughout the year. Gene Cramer was my mentor, as he was the instructor in the small quantity lab and ran the catering portion of the Food Service Administration curriculum. So, when the school year ends, I hook on to some part-time work at the school for a few weeks. Running errands to Morabito's Produce for Mr. Walker in his VW bug was my main job. I neglected to mention that I did not have a driver's license, nor did I have a clue about how to drive a floor shift VW, but I ground out the gears on that VW and no one was the wiser.

Then the phone rings and it's Mr. Cramer. "Hey George, want to make a few bucks?" "The North Bailey Fire Hose picnic is next Saturday and I need reliable help." The picnic would start at noon and go until around 11 PM. Eleven hours at a buck and a half an hour (under the table), sixteen dollars and fifty cents – cha ching! My job was very simple. All I had to do was man one station with two items: corn and raw clams. How easy is that? No money to take, just keep the corn boiling in hot water laced with *Carnaton dry milk powder and open clams. All I can say is, I was never so glad to see that last bag of clams, since these guys were pouring pitchers of Genny down their gullets and yelling for more clams, non-stop. I ran out of clams around 8:00 PM. Those were the longest 8 hours in my life. My left hand looked like it had been through a food processor. For those who are reading this and never opened one of those bivalves, it goes like this, if you are right-handed: Grasp the little devil in your left hand, place the special clam knife on the seam of the clam, squeeze with your left hand forcing the blade into the clam, twist the knife and cut the meat loose, then discard the top part of the shell. When you do this several thousand times over 8 hours, you get pretty good at it.

I got so good at it that I never wanted to do it again. The \$16.50? Gene was kind enough to pay me for the entire 11 hours and my sore, bloodied hand and I limped home.

*Milk powder added to the pot of hot water holding the corn would keep the corn sweet and tender. A Gene Cramer trick.



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Similarly, the WNY Chapter has also recently teamed with Food Allergy Support Services, Inc. to offer an avenue of information regarding food allergies and how to accommodate guests with specific needs. Often, a family will decide where to dine based on the receptiveness of the establishment to just listen to a few questions regarding their menu. Shortly, a FAQ document will be available for all members regarding food allergies designed by Food Allergy Support Services that will allow your staff to answer questions immediately.

These two alliances are just a sampling of the tools that You can utilize to make your establishment more profitable by merely using Your membership in NYSRA to help educate your staff. Membership pays for itself when you use it!

As always, please feel free to contact me for more information at rfree@bisons.com or 716-846-2081

Fill those seats!

Rob



WNY Chapter Members & Restaurant Week (as of August 31 st)

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Excerpts from Buffalo News
By Dino Grandoni
News Business Reporter
Published: August 01 2010

From the Chippewa clubs on Saturday nights to the Pearl Street Grill & Brewery after 5 on weekdays, one thing is obvious: Buffalo is a drinking town. But what, exactly, do people in Western New York like to drink?

The answers -- some well-known, others surprising -- offer a glimpse into the character of the city and what drives its citizens.

In some cases, the Buffalo market is in line with what consumers drink across the country. But the more telling cases are when the city bucks the national trends.

In spirits, our tastes are getting sweeter, as we buy more flavored vodkas. In wines, on the other hand, sweeter is on the way out and drier wines are on their way in. With suds, craft beers are getting more popular while Canadian ones have, well, almost always been a favorite.

Case in point: Labatt. The company's beer is so popular here that it moved its main U.S. office from Connecticut to Buffalo in 2007. The Canadian brewery's two main brands, Labatt Blue and Labatt Blue Light, are the two most popular beers in Erie and Niagara counties, according to recent data from Scarborough Research. Bud Light, Coors Light, Samuel Adams and Molson round out the top beers in the area.

"It's a phenomenon, nothing short of a phenomenon," said Robert G. Kolasa, executive vice president of Try-It Distributing Co., which distributes Labatt. "It's almost like Blue and Blue Light have become beef on weck and chicken wings. It almost has that kind of identification."



Paul Vukelic, president of Try-It Distributing, stands in the company's Lancaster warehouse with pallets full of Labatt Blue Light, a perennial favorite in Western New York. Charles Lewis

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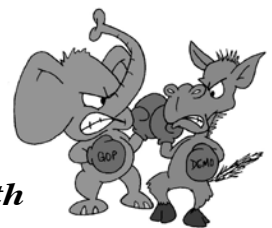
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