

Food



Hot Dish By Morgan Smith

Third-generation owners carry on 78-year tradition of hospitality at DeGidio's

When the master of ceremonies for the retirement parties at my place of employment retired a few years ago, I was asked if I'd be willing to take over his duties.

Not really, I replied.

A retirement committee member then attacked my soft underbelly: "You'll get a free buffet at DeGidio's."

"What do I have to do?" I asked.

It was 10 years ago that my employer moved its retirement parties to DeGidio's, about the time Jason and Joanne Tschida took over the business from Joanne's father, John DeGidio, who had inherited the restaurant from his father, Joe "Kid Bullets" DeGidio. "Kid Bullets," according to the restaurant's website, was a successful bootlegger who at the end of prohibition in 1933 poured his profits into the new DeGidio's bar and restaurant at 425 W. 7th St.

In the 1940s, DeGidio added a four-lane bowling alley to his establishment and eventually expanded it to eight lanes. "They were there until the 1980s," said Jason.

Jason Tschida got his start in the restaurant business at Cecil's in Highland Village, where his mother has worked for 48 years. He later landed a job at DeGidio's and married the boss' daughter. When John decided to retire, Jason and Joanne bought him out. "He still comes in most every day," Jason said. "He has a lot of great stories about the old days."

When the Tschidas purchased the restaurant, they upgraded the HVAC system and kitchen. In the past year, they've also recovered the booth seats and tabletops, hung wallpaper, painted the place inside and out, erected a new outdoor sign and landscaped and resurfaced the parking lot. Although freshened up, the exterior is still rather plain. But inside, DeGidio's is comfortably stylish and reminiscent of an old dinner club with separate bar, dining room and party room.

No one on the retirement committee remembers exactly why we ended up in DeGidio's party room, but the members cannot speak highly enough about the service we receive there year after year. The same holds true in the restaurant. I took a



DeGidio's ever popular Sloppy Dago sandwich.

PHOTO BY
JANET HOSTETTER

few colleagues and a date there a couple of Sundays ago, and we had a fine time.

Restaurant websites claim a lot of things you have to take with a grain of salt, or not, depending on your blood pressure. DeGidio's website claims that its "servings are enormous." There's a lot of truth to that. My friend's wife ordered the Chicken Parmesan (\$12), and when it came to the table, we all sat with our mouths agape. Somebody said it was the *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* of chicken parmeseans, comparing it to the famous mashed potato sculpture in that movie. Although that's a bit hyperbolic, I'm exaggerating only slightly when I say the chicken parmesan was as big as a football—big enough to make me jealous when she raved about how tender the chicken was.

Her husband went with the broiled North American Wall-eye and Parmesan Fries (\$15). The fillet was one of the larger portions of fish I can remember. It came with a house salad, but for an extra \$1.00 he was able to upgrade to the strawberry salad. Two others at the table also had the strawberry salad, and all of them couldn't say enough about it.

I sometimes dismiss such choruses of praise as groupthink, but when I later told a friend that I had just dined at DeGidio's, the first thing out of her mouth was, "Did you have the strawberry salad?"

No, I actually shared a house salad with my date. She thought it could have used some greens besides the iceberg lettuce, but I really liked the house Italian dressing.

I tried the Spicy Penne Arrabiata (\$11), a generous serving of spiced chicken, roasted mushrooms, onions and big chunks

of roma tomatoes tossed with crushed peppers and a splash of cream. It packed a wallop, to the point of having to take the meal home for some leftovers.

My date settled on the Beef Ravioli (\$9.50). Covered in DeGidio's classic red sauce and baked mozzarella, this is the kind of Italian comfort food that has been coming out of DeGidio's kitchen for more than 75 years and will continue to be served there as long as Joann's brother, Tony DeGidio, runs the back of the house.

Much to my surprise, my colleague at school picked the Small Rigatoni (\$9.00) and substituted grilled chicken for the usual meatball (\$2.00 extra). That was surprising because we always have rigatoni at the retirement parties, and I figured he'd want to try something different.

"I like it," he responded when I asked him about the rigatoni.

We were all models of moderation at our table and saved enough room for the Turtle Chocolate Lava Cake (\$4.00), which came with a warm caramel center and pecan and caramel topping, and the Salted Caramel Cheesecake (\$4.50), which had a buttery caramel and almond crust.

In many restaurants, desserts are inflated in size and have a price to match. These were both sized and priced for people who like us had just tried to tackle some of the largest pasta portions served in any restaurant in the Twin Cities.

According to industry research, 60 percent of restaurants close within the first three years of operation. To make it to your 78th year requires great food, great service and reasonable prices—DeGidio's trademarks that we look forward to enjoying for many years to come.