

CORNER CUISINE Alton restaurant receives business award



The Telegraph/MARGIE M. BARNES

Johnson's Corner

Jimmie Johnson, center, co-owner of Johnson's Corner, stands behind JoAnn Strebel, left, retired cook for more than 25 years at the restaurant, and his mother, Mary Lou "Peanut" Johnson, right, in the banquet room during a luncheon for the Marquette High School class of 1953.

Johnson's Corner
2000 State St., Alton
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By FRED POLLARD
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ALTON - For 33 years, the Johnson family has "cornered" the local market when it comes to good meals and good company.

In recognition of its success, Johnson's Corner restaurant has been recognized as the RiverBend Growth Association Business of the Month for October.

"We were surprised when we found out," co-owner Cathy Johnson said. "We really appreciate all of the hard work everyone does (at the RBGA)."

Bob Johnson originally opened Bob's Place in the 1970s on Broadway in Alton, where he provided lunch for professionals in the downtown area. When his lease ran out, Bob and his wife, Mary Lou, opened Johnson's Corner in October of 1979.

Right away, the couple built a clientele of regular customers and people grew accustomed to seeing Bob and his wife, also known by the nickname "Peanut."

"I believe her dad always called her that when she was little, and the name just stuck," Cathy said, laughing.

Johnson's Corner became well-known for its home-style family meals, particularly the pork tenderloin.

"That is still a big seller," Cathy said. "We prepare it ourselves and use only fresh pork, breaded and grilled."

Today, the diner offers lunch and dinner, an extensive dessert menu, and full-service bar under the leadership of Bob and Mary Lou's son, Jimmie and his wife, Cathy.

"We have our banquet room and we do outside catering as well," Cathy said.

Appetizers and a la carte items include toasted ravioli, roasted potatoes, nachos and homemade onion rings. Johnson's also has an extensive sandwich and pasta menu, and began serving Stanley Pizzas last year.

"We got our firestone pizza ovens and began serving those last October," Cathy said. "That is going really well. They have become one of our more popular menu items."

Several other family members have served as employees, and Jimmie and Cathy say they are grooming their own sons to take over the business someday, ensuring another 33 years of full bellies and hearty laughs.

"We are friendly, family-oriented, and Jimmie is there day and night," Cathy said. "People know him and are used to seeing him there. We have loyal customers who came here as children and now they are grown and bring their kids in with them to eat."

"Plus, our food is really good."

In a challenging economy, Johnson said their family restaurant is a wise choice for tight budgets.

"We do not have anything on our menu over \$19.99," Johnson said. "Our prices are very acceptable for our customers, and we work to keep it that way."

Johnson's Corner also offers deep-fried and baked turkeys during the Thanksgiving holiday as a seasonal item, and hosts annual Christmas Eve parties and Labor Day family picnics.

For more information, call (618) 465-5640.