

TIME AND A HALF

Downtown establishment named Business of the Month



The Telegraph/MARGIE M. BARNES

Manager Vanna Lenhardt of Mac's Time Out on Belle Street in Downtown Alton serves the popular Vegas burger and Shock Top Ale at the popular bar and eatery, which was named Business of the Month for May by the RiverBend Growth Association.

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**By JESS CHARLTON
For The Telegraph**

ALTON - Mac's Time Out, 315 Belle St., has been named May's RiverBend Growth Association Business of the Month.

The honor thrilled owner Van "Mac" Lenhardt.

"It felt great to win," he said. "It's awesome and very rewarding."

Mac's Time Out has been in business for 30 years this December. The vision Lenhardt had when he first opened, and one that persists, is to provide quality food with excellent service.

"Our goal is for our customers to be greeted and seated within 30 seconds from their arrival," he said.

Mac has not let a weak economy stop him from continuing to improve his business and said he believes any Downtown Alton business is great for the thriving downtown community.

"Mac's first started as one building. But in six years, we acquired the entire city block," he said.

Lenhardt said he always loved older buildings, and that was a concept when he first opened Mac's.

During the creation of Mac's, Lenhardt was working a full-time job and spent his nights building his business. Lenhardt said when Mac's first opened, there were only four employees, two of whom are still with him. Now Mac's has become a business with more than 40 part-time employees and about 50 employees in general. Some of his staff, he added, has been there for several years.

Much has changed since the opening of Mac's, including adding food to the menu five years ago.

"It was the best thing that we could have done," he said. "We have received nothing but positive feedback on it."

Lenhardt believed the change to add food to Mac's would be ideal. He said customers would be happiest if they could sit and drink at the same place. Mac's food items can include pizza, burgers and even steaks. In addition to lunch and dinners, Mac's is open for Sunday brunches.

All of the food from Mac's is fresh.

In 2012, St. Louis Magazine recognized Mac's as one of the Metro East's best brunches.

In the past four years, Lenhardt has invested about \$300,000 to expand and improve their beer garden, which seats 112 patrons. In 2008, Mac's received the Pride award for their landscape facade and beer garden.

Wireless Internet also was added throughout the establishment, along with a 40-inch flat-screen TV.

When Lenhardt thinks of the successful 30 years, he credits his staff.

"I have such an incredible staff. They are just such hard workers. A lot of them are in school and working their way through college, and they still give me their all when they're here," he said.

Lenhardt said a strong work ethic is the reason his business has succeeded.

"In this market, you have to keep a good, hard work ethic," he said.

When Lenhardt decided it was best to close the nightclub side of Mac's five years ago, he decided to turn it into a room for private functions at no cost.

"Everyone and anyone is more than welcome to use that for any event," he said.

Mac's Time Out is geared toward many types of crowds. Whether it's the crowd into horse racing, business lunches, in the mood for dinner or younger people out for the night, Mac's has what you are looking for.

Lenhardt's children, Vanna and Rob, also help with the family business. Vanna, Lenhardt's daughter, is in the process of getting her master's degree and will be finished next year.

"Although I will have a job in another field, I believe I will always be around to help with the family business," she said.

Rob, Lenhardt's son, plans to take over the business when and if Mac decides to retire.

Mac's Time Out is open 11 a.m. until 2 a.m. Monday through Thursday; 11 a.m. until 3 a.m. Friday and Saturday; and 9 a.m. until 2 a.m. Sunday.