

RESTAURANT RECOGNITION

Tony's named Business of the Month

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By FRED POLLARD
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ALTON - Rather than just the 53 percent, Tony's Restaurant wants to be the dining destination for the entire area.

"We are the place where everyone can afford to come and eat," president and co-owner Leonard Ventimiglia said.

Tony's Restaurant, 312 Piasa St. in Downtown Alton, has been recognized as the RiverBend Growth Association Business of the Month for September.

"I appreciate being nominated," Ventimiglia said.

For nearly 60 years, Tony's has been a favorite stop for generations of wedding parties, prom dates, and families looking for a nice getaway from a hot kitchen stove. It also has been the home of the famous family mainstay, the pepperloin steak.

Tony and Edith Ventimiglia opened the restaurant in 1954.

"My dad ran the bar and greeted the people," Leonard Ventimiglia said. "My mom and my grandmother did all of the cooking. My mother is the one who came up with the pepperloin.

"We started out with pizza, pastas and burgers. The steak came later."

Consistency has played a vital role in the restaurant's success, with the kitchen keeping the same recipes and purchasing ingredients with a focus on quality over cost-cutting.

While refusing to sacrifice quality, Ventimiglia said he is doing all he can to keep prices affordable, and is in the process of implementing a new family-style menu for larger groups.

"We are offering inflation-fighting menu items for families during these tough economic times," he said. "What we will have will compare in price to buffets, but with the high-quality food people have come to expect of Tony's.

"We are putting the menu together as we speak. We want to have this up and rolling within the next few weeks."

Tony's has hired a full-time catering manager to coordinate schedules and meet the needs of its customers, whether they are looking for breakfast, lunch or dinner.

With a seating capacity of more than 400, Ventimiglia said the restaurant can provide comfort for any size party.

"We have seven separate dining rooms, so we can accommodate groups, families and business meetings," he said.

In addition to catering and family-style dinners, other changes include the transformation of the old Third Street Cafe into the all-new Prohibition Lounge.

"The name came to us when we brought in the brewed beers, or as I call them, homemade bathtub beers," he said, laughing. "It reminded me of the days of Prohibition when they had to be creative with the production."

Patrons are able to come in and choose from 30 selections of craft beer and 30 types of vodka. Selections constantly change.

"Many of these craft beers are limited when it comes to the time that they are available," Ventimiglia said. "They come and go."

He said that makes the lounge menu more exciting, as there is always something new to try.

Along with the new name, the bar also received a renovation, with new tables, chairs, bar area and chalkboards. New menu items include the Teriyaki chicken and the ultimate potato burger.

Specials at the Prohibition Lounge include pepperloin, chicken or wild spiced pork kabobs for \$9.99 on Thursdays, and 10-inch pizzas for \$5 on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Drink specials include the "brewer's dozen" on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, where 13 selected craft beers are \$2.50.

For the restaurant side, Tuesdays offer all-you-can-eat pasta for \$8.99.

In addition to the latest recognition as River Bend Growth Association Business of the Month, Tony's also has been given numerous awards, including best restaurant, best steak, best outdoor dining, best atmosphere and best happy hour.

Tony's Restaurant is open daily at 4:30 p.m. For information, call (618) 462-8384 or visit the website at www.tonysrestaurant.com.