

FALL 2008

# Next Course

THE MAGAZINE FOR CUSTOMERS OF GORDON FOOD SERVICE®



*Clara's Lansing Station*

All Aboard for Fun Dining | 38

U.S. \$6.00 CAN \$7.00

BY TOM DIXON

# All Aboard for Fun Dining



Clara's is more than just a restaurant — it's a tourist destination that attracts railroad buffs from near and far.



Want to equip your restaurant with a hedge against economic slowdowns? Make it something more than a restaurant.

That's what Peter Jubeck did more than 30 years ago when he opened Clara's Lansing Station. Jubeck had brought the original Sir Pizza® franchise to Lansing, Michigan, back in 1966. By the mid-'70s, he was itching to develop a broader restaurant concept.

A history buff, Jubeck found the perfect venue in an abandoned 1903 railroad depot located in the heart of downtown. The building had fallen into disrepair, but it retained the elaborate stone-cut arches and towers that marked it as a sterling example of Romanesque design.

Jubeck fell in love with the building, and spent much time and money restoring and refurbishing it. He worked with local artists and craftsmen to authentically duplicate Victorian-era windows and woodwork. He decorated the interior with antiques — chandeliers from Paris and Belgium, a fireplace mantel from the home of a 19th-century Michigan lumber baron, one of the first General Electric clocks ever made, and much, much more. Everywhere you look, in fact, there are antiquities and artifacts, each with a story of its own to dazzle and delight diners.

There's even a story behind the restaurant name. Jubeck and his Sir-Pizza franchisor, Bob Schwartz, brainstormed

a number of Victorian-sounding female names and threw them into a hat. What emerged was the name of Schwartz's mother, Clara. And the rest, as they say, is history.

## A GREAT MAN, A GREAT BUSINESS

Jubeck opened Clara's in 1979. Nearly 30 years later, the restaurant is run by Jubeck's children, Scott and Cindy. "Dad passed away in 2003," Cindy Jubeck says with a sigh. "But he left us an amazing legacy — a successful business, a landmark building and warm, wonderful memories. People come up to me all the time to tell me what Dad did for them, unbeknownst to any of us. He was a great, great man."

## PROFILES: CLARA'S

Scott and Cindy are now co-owners and co-managers of the business, and mom Linda pitches in when needed. Much has changed outside the restaurant since those early days: A restored Pullman dining car now sits alongside the depot building, accommodating up to 56 diners. Once surrounded by seedy bars and adult bookstores, Clara's is now smack dab in the midst of a trendy shopping and dining boulevard, just blocks from Michigan's capitol building. And the competition for dining dollars has increased exponentially, from both new chain and independent restaurants.

### RESTAURANT SNAPSHOT

-  **OPERATION:**  
Clara's Lansing Station  
and Clara's on the River
-  **LOCATION:**  
Lansing and Battle Creek,  
Michigan
-  **CLASSIFICATION:** Casual-family
-  **NUMBER OF SEATS:** 300  
(Lansing); 390 indoors, plus a  
100-seat patio (Battle Creek)
-  **DAYPARTS SERVED:** Lunch,  
Dinner
-  **CHECK AVERAGE:** \$10 to \$12,  
Lunch; \$14 to 18, Dinner
-  **SIGNATURE DISHES:** Hawaiian  
Chicken, Fajitas, Burgers and  
Salads
-  **YEARS IN BUSINESS:**  
29 (Lansing); 16 (Battle Creek)
-  **BACK-OF-THE-HOUSE STAFF:**  
30 (Lansing); 25 (Battle Creek)
-  **FRONT-OF-THE-HOUSE STAFF:**  
50 (Lansing); 35 (Battle Creek)
-  **GUIDING PHILOSOPHY:**  
Casual, comfortable, fun dining  
in a one-of-a-kind, museum-like  
setting

## profiles

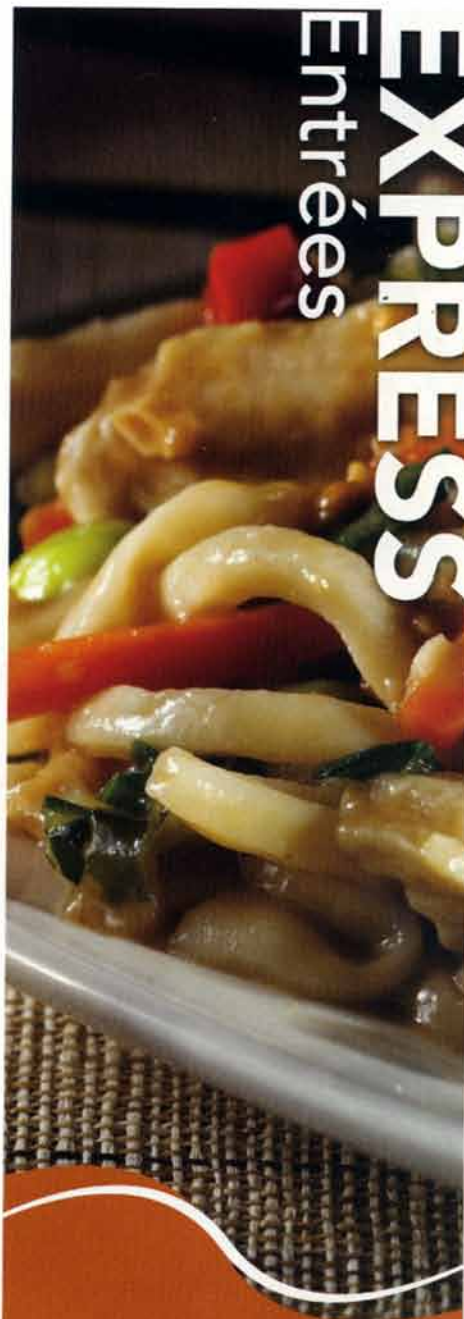
Still, nobody — nobody — offers the Clara's ambiance. It's the only dining spot in America to appear on the *USA Today*® list of "10 great places to cherish our choo-choo heritage." More than just a restaurant, it's a tourist destination. And the constant stream of tour buses and train buffs helps insulate it from the economic downturns that plague its competition.

Don't get the idea food is an afterthought at Clara's, though. Its menu is as impressive as its physical structure. "Dad wanted to make sure there was something for everyone." He succeeded — →



Clara's serves comforting food in a comfortable setting. Owners Scott and Cindy Jubeck honor their father's memory and have built upon his legacy.

# EXPRESS Entrées



**GFS® Prepared Entrées** are made from scratch using premium ingredients that are cooked together for the first time in your oven. They're the easy way to serve up maximum flavor with minimum fuss. More than 30 selections in all!



For product information, please see page 79.

# SPEEDY sides



## GFS® Prepared Side Entrées

are ready in a hurry—just heat and serve for a delicious accompaniment to any meal. They're also ready to customize—you can easily add your own ingredients to create a signature touch!



For product information, please see page 79.



Top left: Ross Simpson, Owner and Manager of Clara's on the River in Battle Creek, Michigan. Right: Server/Trainer Amy Churchill enhances the guest experience at Clara's.

whether you're in the mood for appetizers, soup, salads, sandwiches, steaks, pasta, burgers, pizza, pork, chicken, seafood, desserts or simply a cocktail, Clara's will astonish you with choices.

In addition to a multitude of options, Clara's serves generous portions. "We're known for our big portions," Jubeck says. "It is impossible to leave here hungry."

### A SISTER RESTAURANT

Did we say nobody offers the Clara's ambiance? A slight correction: There is one other restaurant that boasts a similar effect. Clara's on the River in Battle Creek, Michigan, is also located in an old railroad depot. It is also festooned with antiques and artifacts. And it was also founded by Peter Jubeck.

Jubeck partnered with longtime employee Ross Simpson to open Clara's on the River in 1992. For a time, Simpson served as General Manager for both the Battle Creek and Lansing locations. Today, he is sole owner and manager of the Battle Creek restaurant. Yet he still works closely with the Jubecks in Lansing to maintain a consistent brand identity between the two operations.

"We have the same menu, the same hours and the same Sunday brunch," Simpson explains. "It's just that our décor is a bit different, as we've collected many items that are significant to the history of Battle Creek."

Clara's excellent servers are as well-versed in suggestive selling as they are in local history.

For instance, visitors are greeted in the foyer by a collection of some of the first cereal boxes ever printed. "Battle Creek is home to both Post® and Kellogg®," Simpson explains. "We also have early advertisements and items from the personal collection of Mr. and Mrs. Post."

As with Lansing Station, the unique setting makes Clara's on the River a popular site for small weddings, rehearsal dinners and meetings. "We have a 60-seat banquet room as well as a 100-seat patio overlooking the Battle

## PROFILES: CLARA'S

Creek River. We doubled the patio size this year after the city let us annex some of the adjoining park grounds."

Something else Clara's did this year was "unbundle" its dinner salads from its entrées. "Our business is not as affected by economic conditions as our competition's is," Simpson says, "but we got to the point where we had to make some concession to rising commodity prices. So we made dinner salads an à la carte item. This allowed us to hold down or prevent price increases — and it's actually encouraged customers to order more appetizers."

That's with a little encouragement from Clara's excellent servers, who are as well-versed in suggestive selling as they are in local history. "We ask a lot of our employees, but we treat them well and give them the tools they need to succeed," Simpson says. "This still is a family business, still run according to the principles Peter Jubeck established all those years ago. Peter called it 'fun dining' — a place where you'll feel welcome whether you're wearing a tuxedo or a t-shirt!"

Or a conductor's cap, for that matter.  
NCX

Servers like Shannon Tallent have been given the training and the tools to make sure that guests are happy.



"We ask a lot of our employees, but we treat them well and give them the tools they need to succeed."



Housed in a 1903 railroad depot, Clara's serves generous portions so big that no one goes home hungry.

profiles

ACCELERATED  
Appetizers



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For product information, please see page 79.