

THE VILLAGE

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GOOD STEER

The Good Steer celebrates its 50th anniversary

Known for its onion rings, the Lake Grove institution offers good food at reasonable rates

BY ALEX GILLAM

The Good Steer is celebrating its 50th "Good" year in business. The Lake Grove institution has been "making your onion ring" since 1957, when Eisenhower was in the White House, Alaska and Hawaii had yet to gain statehood and the Long Island Expressway was nothing more than a dotted line on the map.

Bob McCarroll founded the restaurant with his wife Linda and they still run it along with their son Bob Jr.

"Good food at reasonable prices, consistent quality," are what McCarroll Sr. credits his success with. "It's really not a secret. Pretty simple, do the best that you can and don't be something that you're not," Bob Jr. added.

Bob Sr. said another key ingredient in his recipe for success is changing with the times while still doing what you do best.

"The other thing is to keep in mind that you do have to change as time goes by and you can't just stick to the same game plan," McCarroll Sr. said. "We used to be just strictly hamburgers and the old days it was four hamburgers to the pound [of beef]. Now it's a larger burger — it's become more involved and there's more sides with it. We've also gotten involved with fresh fish items. Our steaks are much more involved now; we age our meat for three weeks."

Menus aren't the only thing that change over 50 years. The Good Steer now finds itself competing with chain restaurants.

"You have to remember every fly bites and we just have to figure out what we do well and keep doing it well," Mc-

Carroll Sr. said. "They're a formidable foe for these chains because they do it well and they put up beautiful buildings. But the thing we have that they don't have is we prepare our own stuff. They're a kind of cookie-cutter. They buy stuff that's already frozen, like their meat's already frozen, already butchered. We have an in-house butcher."

McCarroll Sr. said that nothing served in the Good Steer comes out of the can. Meat, soup and even the salad dressing is prepared on site, which he said gives the Good Steer an edge over the chains.

McCarroll Sr. said another edge the Good Steer has is that it caters to families. Each season Linda McCarroll changes the display in the loft over the lobby, which Bob McCarroll Sr. said "the kids get a big kick out of."

"We have a full children's menu which includes an entree, a beverage and a dessert," McCarroll Sr. said. "A lot of competition will give you an entree sometimes for free or reduced price but they hit you over the head for the price of a soda and a dessert. We include everything so when you bring your kid here you don't have to spend a fortune."

When asked if the Good Steer would be around in 2057, McCarroll Jr. said he hoped so.

"It would be very nice to see because so much of the world is getting taken over by big corporations and chains," McCarroll Jr. said. "The restaurant business is really one of the last places where an independent can make it."

Back in 1957, Route 25 was a two-lane byway, the Smith Haven Mall was nothing more than a farm and the



Photo by Alex Gillam

The Good Steer, which opened in 1957, has become a Middle Country landmark and a fixture on Route 25 in Lake Grove.

shopping center across the street from the Good Steer was a patch of woods. McCarroll Sr. said he has many fond memories of the past half-century.

"People come in here and say 'Gee, I ate in the Good Steer when I was in a high chair.' Now they show up with their children," McCarroll Sr. said. "I also have fond memories of a lot of the celebrities that used to come in here over the years. It used to be fun. The Gabor sisters were here, Ava Gardner was here, E.G. Marshal and Bert Lahr, the Cowardly Lion from *The Wizard*

of Oz."

One thing the Good Steer is best known for is its onion rings, which McCarroll said take about 2,000 to 3,000 pounds of Spanish onion per week to make. However, he added that so many years of making them have allowed him to build up a tolerance for the smell of onions.

"You seem to get used to it," McCarroll said of the onion smell. "But every so often it hits you," McCarroll Jr. added.

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