

A Family Affair

by Amanda DeProspero
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It was nearly 40 years ago that the Muriale family opened an Italian restaurant on Fairmont Avenue. Muriale's owner Rocco Muriale said his parents, Frank and Violet Muriale; his uncle and aunt, Sam and Rose Muriale; and his grandparents Rocco and Isabelle Muriale, were the founders of the restaurant, which features Italian fare, including steaks, seafood, pastas, pizzas and hoagies. "They all have a special place in the foundation of this restaurant," Rocco Muriale said. "It couldn't have succeeded without their time and investment." It started out in the summer of 1969 when they came together and decided to showcase their family recipes. At the time, the building only seated 34 people. "Things were done with a handshake," Muriale said, and the family used many area suppliers to get the business going. In the 1980s, Rocco Muriale said the family bought the property and renovations began on additions. Now, the restaurant is 7,500 square feet, employs 80 people and seats a whopping 370-380 people. After college, Muriale began working in the family restaurant and became immersed in the business.

"As time went on, I took more of a leading role," said Muriale, who now runs the successful business.

The restaurant opens at 11 a.m. every day, serving lunch and dinner, with dinner being the busiest time, Muriale said. Special events, such as weddings and parties, can also be held in the 2,500-square-foot banquet facility.

Muriale said many people will drop in to the restaurant from the interstate or during big events, but regulars make up a big portion of his customers. In fact, he said he recognizes many faces from when the restaurant first opened. Though they are now bringing in their own children and grandchildren.

"They've been coming here for years and enjoy the Italian fare, hospitality and service," he said, adding that not much as changed in terms of the food served. "It's pretty much the same homemade recipe we've been serving here for 40 years."

His favorite is the lasagna, which was a secret, old family recipe handed down from his grandmother Isabelle.

Dining room manager Aaron Sigley agreed about the lasagna being his top pick. And, he said it's because the restaurant still uses the same products and brands as it did years ago.

"We don't try to lower our quality of item just because the prices go up," Sigley said, adding "if it isn't broke, don't fix it."

Instead, he looks for the best prices on those same brands and products. Changing the pasta sauce is something customers would notice, he said, so he tries his best to make it the classic way. "People like the consistency," Sigley said.

Customers also appreciate the attentiveness of the servers, he said, and he gets many good comments from the guests.

The restaurant has also received many awards and mentions, including "Best Restaurant for 2007" by the Marion County Visitors Bureau, the Silver Spoon Award, the 5-star Diamond Award and Who's Who in America's Restaurants. Muriale's is also known for its decorated walls, which are filled with memorabilia ranging from sports icons to family photos. On one wall is a signed leotard that once belonged to Olympic gold medalist Mary Lou Retton. A framed West Virginia University basketball jersey also hangs in the restaurant. Family photos are arranged on a wall in one dining room. Muriale said his favorite moments at the restaurant were when his grandparents were involved and he was still learning the family business. But, he also enjoys running a restaurant, too. It's not really like work, he said, because he's always been interested in the restaurant business.

"It's in your blood," he said. "It's part of who you are."

