

LOCAL PEOPLE GET STAR BILLING WITH RESTAURANTS NAME DISHES AFTER THEM

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Pete Silverman has discovered two distinctly different paths to fame: politics and his palate.

Sure, the lawyer spent time as a city councilman and president of the Toledo Board of Education, but it's Pete Silverman's Salad Combo — a mix of pasta and Greek salads and fattoush that he suggested years ago at Manos Greek Restaurant on Adams Street— that keeps people talking.

"I get comments all the time," Mr. Silverman said. "I'm now out of the public eye, so it's like my one last little bout of celebrity when someone will come out and say, 'Hey, I saw your name on the menu of Manos,' and make me feel like I'm a big shot again."

That's a level of fame to which all of us can aspire. You could live a good life eating only foods named for other people: eggs Benedict, Melba toast, Betty salad, fettuccine Alfredo, bananas Foster, Earl Grey tea. Or, as Mr. Silverman and others who have popped up on local menus show, you could eat foods named after yourself.

Sometimes the items come as bolts of inspiration; others evolve over time. At Tropics Lounge on Sylvania Avenue, it took a while to formulate the Lenny Special. Its creator, Lenny Sowinski, was a Jeep worker who came in one day and decided that he wanted a corned beef sandwich with Swiss cheese and cream cheese on rye bread.

"I didn't have any cream cheese so I went next door and bought some," said owner Ken Jablonski.

The scene replayed on another visit when Mr. Sowinski thought it would taste better on a bagel, and again when he later wanted to add salami.

"It was a long process," Mr. Jablonski said. "Other people watching him do this, they asked for it too. ... One thing led to another and now it's my most popular sandwich."

In its final form, the dish is a grilled bagel with swiss cheese, grilled corned beef and salami, and cream cheese.

"I can't take any credit. All I did was keep buying something the guy wanted," Mr. Jablonski said. "I told him one time I'd give him a penny a sandwich. I'd probably owe him hundreds of thousands of dollars. I told him it's in the mail."

Sometimes getting on the menu is all about knowing the right people — or being related to them.

"All of the names that are on our menus, they are all actual family members," said Shain Buerk, president of Scrambler Marie's restaurants, based in Holland.

The dishes often are paired with a specific name because it's that person's favorite dish or because it seems a good fit for their personality, he said.

The only problem is that sometimes the item doesn't catch on with the public and ends up getting removed from the menu. That's what happened with two different dishes named after Mr. Buerk's son, Philip.

"He was a little depressed," the father said.



Larry Friedman, left, and Pete Silverman hold salads named after them at Manos Greek Restaurant. (THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT)

Fortunately, there were waffles in Philip's future.

"I was happy because I really like waffles," the 12-year-old said. "Pretty much every time I go I get them."

At Dudley's Diner on Reynolds Road, co-owner Roger Turner named two dishes after family. Earl's Special is a chicken sandwich that pays homage to his uncle, Earl Carpenter, for working about 50 years at the restaurant. Mr. Carpenter, 85, of South Toledo, still eats it a couple of times a week.

Debbie's Special, on the other hand, came about because Mr. Turner's first wife, who died in 2003, couldn't eat foods with gluten in them. The platter includes a grilled chicken breast smothered with grilled mushrooms, onions, and mozzarella cheese, and french fries.

"She had celiac disease and so this was one of her favorite things to eat," he said. "Other people started requesting it so we put it on the menu."

At Grumpy's on Huron Street, a few foods are named after good friends and loyal customers. For Linda Liber, a nonprofit fund-raising consultant from Ottawa Hills who used to eat at the restaurant all the time, coming up with the Princess Linda salad was sort of addition by subtraction.

"I'd say: Can I have that without the chicken or bacon or not so much cheese or whatever ... It's kind of evolved over the years," she said.

As so often happens over time, though, some things get forgotten.

"Oftentimes if I go in there ... if I don't know any of the waitresses, I'll say, 'I'll have the Princess Linda. I'm Linda.' And they're like, 'No!'"

Aside from honoring someone or giving credit where it's due, sprinkling a menu with reminders of real people can be smart business, said Jennifer Shemak, chef at Grumpy's who has her own name represented in a number of items.

"I think it just makes it a little more personal," she said.

Manos Paschalis, owner of the Uptown restaurant that bears his name, agrees.

"I think it does help me," he said. "It gives it a sort of personal appeal when they see a local name there that people know."

His menu has a trinity of salads named after local Jewish men, including Mr. Silverman, who made his suggestion because he keeps kosher and was looking for a nice vegetarian mix at the restaurant.

Larry Friedman, president of Toledo Building Services, had a different motivation behind his idea.

"I thought: This is not nearly as nutritious as it needs to be."

So he added some broccoli and carrots and another addition to the menu was born.

Howard Rosenbaum, who is retired from Goody's Truck Parts and Equipment, had an even bigger vision, suggesting hearts of artichoke, pine nuts, and stuffed grape leaves in a salad. That proved too expensive, he said, but he's satisfied that he got loads of feta, chicken, and gyro meat in a hearty salad big enough to feed two. Mr. Paschalis said it's a big seller.

"One day, I told Howard it's time to put some signs outside the restaurant: 1 million Howard Rosenbaum salads sold, like McDonald's."

Mr. Rosenbaum said his creation frequently led people who met his wife at work to ask: "Who's your husband? Is he famous?"

That kind of fame can be a lot of fun, but it can also put someone like Mr. Silverman in an unusual quandary, given his recent eating habits.

"Another irony is I now order the Larry Friedman," he said.

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