

# FOODSERVICE NEWS

Volume 30 • Issue 7

The News and Information Source for Restaurants and the Foodservice Industry

August 2019

[www.foodserviceneews.net](http://www.foodserviceneews.net)

## Mancini's is still your parents' restaurant, but they'll likely treat you to a steak there



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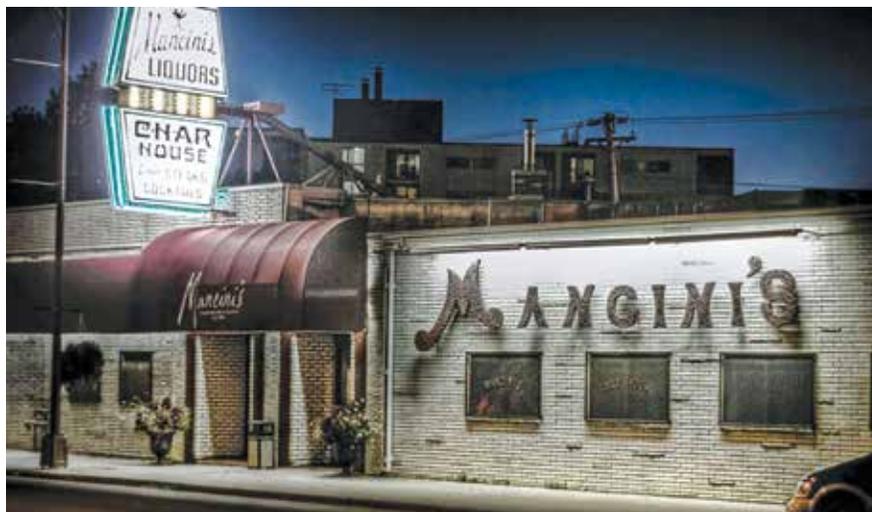
**W**HERE CAN YOU GO IN THE Twin Cities and feel like you can get the same meal your parents had, or, even your grandparents? Mancini's is definitely the place. It's a restaurant that has stayed consistent and while it's evolved in some ways, it still is a truly iconic supper club.

On a recent trip to Mancini's, I ran into Pat Mancini and was able to ask him the questions every restaurant business person loves to ask. He first gave me the background on the building itself and how his family had added onto the building three or four times to configure all the different unique spaces. Today the business is owned by Pat and his brother/partner, John.

They've tried to stay true to its supper club roots. Originally it was strictly a small, blue-collar bar that Pat and John's grandmother ran. She did the shopping, cooked and wrote that day's meals on cardboard menus each day.

Mancini's started out with 30 seats in the dining room and 20 seats at the bar. The family kept buying the property around them, so in addition to Mancini's, they own adjacent properties where they collect rent.

The restaurant has grown to 600 seats. They have two major dining rooms, and two other rooms that can be used as dining rooms or banquet facilities, which together can accommodate 200



or more people. Over the years, they've hosted thousands of rehearsal dinners, bachelor dinners, wedding receptions and all types of family events.

Pat's three children, a son and two daughters, are active in the business and also run their Minnesota State Fair location. John's children are a little younger, but the brothers definitely want the next generation to keep the business going. It provides for the families and they own the real estate in a separate limited partnership. What makes it really work is that they have the real estate expense for themselves, which makes a strong profit.

The food is a traditional Minnesota-Wisconsin supper club cuisine. Each table gets a relish tray and garlic toast, while the menu's focus is on steak and some fish. Throw in a chicken entrée and a few other items and you've got a classic supper club. Minnesotans still embrace this approach. Supper clubs throughout the Midwest are still going strong. In fact, recently a Wisconsin-style supper club was planned for New York.

The clientele is mixed, but includes lots of grandparents with their kids and grandkids. There's also a lot of informal group dining. The crowd seems to come pretty early, and even during the week there's a strong showing.

Servers wear uniforms that are fairly consistent with a supper club, but I was surprised at the age of the servers. There are many millennial or generation Z servers. From what I could see, the kitchen staff looked older.

Let's look at the various components:

### Food Cost

They seemed to have mastered food cost. Much of the food is made and delivered by their food wholesaler. Salads are portioned right, and I believe pre-chopped. Condiments from the tartar sauce for their famous walleye to butter to sour cream are delivered to the table prepackaged. All of this is consistent with a supper club approach, but it also maintains their food cost. Most large places that are so protein-centric have much higher food cost,

but I have to believe they keep their food cost around the low 30 percent range and with a strong food and alcohol mix, with an emphasis on cocktails.

**Rating:** 4.0 out of 4 stars.

#### **Labor Cost**

With a facility that big with different kitchen setups and bars, requiring different servers and bartenders, with different styles, it's got to be a full-time job just to control labor. They are one of the few remaining union shops. They do a good job on service so I would say that the labor has got to be their biggest challenge. The family management may help, as cost of labor is spread among the owners and their families, but the front and back of the house has just got to be a bear. Pat said they try to keep labor under 45 percent of sales.

**Rating:** 2.0 out of 4 stars.

#### **Revenue**

Check average is about \$55. My guesstimation of \$7 million to \$8 million was on target, according to Pat. Additional revenue comes from the State Fair operation and catering.

I think the beauty of the revenue model here is that they've got varied profit centers. They have everything from private dining to catering, to people who just come in and drink to people who have impromptu gatherings, so the revenue on an overall amount should be good. But if you look at revenue per restaurant seat or revenue per square foot, it's obviously problematic because it is such a big facility, but a \$7 million-to-\$8 million dollar restaurant is to be admired—immensely.

**Rating:** 3.0 out of 4 stars.

#### **Return on Investment**

When you've owned your building for that long, you're looking at an early time investment that's been on for quite a while. They have kept the building and parking lot in good shape, so there's capital investment every year. So it's really hard to make a determination of return on investment because you've got an historic cost. At present-day's numbers and having to build a building that size and everything else, your return would be very poor, but I have to believe because of the historic nature of this institution

that the return is still very good. That's why they keep the restaurant going. It also provides a livelihood for a number of family members.

**Rating:** 3.0 out of 4 stars.

This is truly an iconic venue with lots of things that we, as restaurant people, could take from it. You couldn't in a million years duplicate this kind of facility or concept again, particularly in the downtown St. Paul area, but we're just glad that it's still there and glad that we still have the opportunity to go and experience an iconic venue.

**Overall Rating:** 3.0 out of 4 stars. **FSN**

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