

RAVE REVIEWS PRESS RELEASE

The Chronicle-Telegram Queen of Cuisine

If there's one thing in life that Shelley Prueter knows, it's what makes a good restaurant. She should, after all, given that her father, Eddy Solomon, owned and operated the venerable McGarvey's in Vermilion for 42 years.

But rather than making the choice to dive entirely into operating a restaurant herself, Prueter of Lorain opted for a slightly different path — creating a training business called Rave Reviews to help “good restaurants become great,” she said.

Restaurant owners hire her company to increase their bottom line, and she does so by conducting an operational audit and visiting the restaurant as many as eight times over a two- or three-month period. She goes in knowing what to look for — flaws in service and operation that can cost restaurants big bucks.

Need to be sharp

For example, if servers aren't trying to sell the menu to customers, that can add up to huge loss of revenue. One appetizer and one drink can add as much as \$17 to a check, so if 50 to 100 tables are enticed each night, it can add a lot to the restaurant's sales for the year, she said.

And don't think restaurants aren't big business. The National Restaurant Association reports that industry sales for Ohio are expected to reach \$16 billion this year — a 5 percent increase over 2006. The association also predicts a 5.8 percent jump in job growth.

“This is a growing industry — owners need to be sharp to capture the revenue,” Prueter said.

Prueter also helps new restaurants get started right. Debbie Gallo, owner of Maxx Doogan's, sought out Prueter when she opened her three locations. Gallo said the result was a well-trained staff and managers.

“She is very good and has been in the business as long as anyone,” Gallo said. That really is an understatement.

Prueter practically was raised in McGarvey's — working as a hostess, busgirl and clerk. She did everything but bartend, and that was only because she was too young.

“I grew up there,” she explained, matter-of-factly. And even when she wasn't there, she often was nearby at her grandmother's cottage.

She laughs as she recalls sneaking into the restaurant kitchen to snag some shrimp, which she used as bait while fishing for carp.

Her father's erratic schedule — tailored around the restaurant — made life interesting and unusual, she said.

“My mom was a typical homemaker and my dad was a blast. He worked hard and played hard and always took me and my girlfriends to Cedar Point and to Perkins Pancake House on (Route) 254 at 3 in the morning when he got off work,” Prueter said.

Everybody loved him . . .

For years, Prueter dabbled in a variety of jobs. She was a restaurant consultant when she helped to open Great Lakes Brewing Co., and then she and her husband, Jim, worked to expand their veterinarian business, which they sold after 22 years. After that, she spent two years as the director of enterprise development for Lorain County Community College, and she was the managing director of the Great Lakes Innovation & Development Enterprise, a public-private partnership based at LCCC that helps foster growth in new and established businesses.

In 2002, however, she decided to devote herself to Rave Reviews full time, although she continues to help LCCC with various endeavors.

She admits going out on her own wasn't easy — she'd always done jobs that focused on specific roles, but she quickly learned she needed to don many hats to be a self-employed entrepreneur. But even faced with the many tasks of a business owner, Prueter was compelled to take on one more — opening Cap'n Eddy's in Lorain, an ice cream and coffee shop behind the Jackalope Bar & Rotisserie in the spring.

"I named it in honor and memory of my dad, Eddy," she said. "They called him Cap'n Eddy, and this caricature I used in my logo was his from McGarvey's. He was and still is my favorite person in the whole world and everyone loved him at McGarvey's. "I did this to meet people again from Lorain and hear their wonderful stories about meeting at McGarvey's and hearing my dad's jokes — getting engaged at McGarvey's, having bowling banquets at McGarvey's. Seems everyone has a McGarvey story, and it warms my heart.

"My dad loved the people. When McGarvey's closed after 42 years and when my dad was asked if he missed it, he always said, 'I miss the people.' "

Passion about entrepreneurship

In addition to reviewing restaurants, Prueter also has published books about the restaurant industry. They include: "Serve 'em Right," which she wrote with her father, "12 Steps to Bottom Line Success" and "50 Tips for Restaurant Start Up."

She also secured two government grants to start the Restaurant Training School, which is held at career centers around the area.

On Nov. 1, she'll host a restaurant start-up class at Cuyahoga County Community College's Corporate College, and she's working with local community colleges to develop an accredited restaurant management certification program.

She's also working with a local college to set up curriculum for a four-year degree.

The mother of two college-age sons, Prueter also is committed to helping others succeed in the business world. She volunteers for Common Ground, SCORE, Students in Free Enterprise at LCCC, and Junior Achievement of Lorain County.

"She has so much passion about entrepreneurship and Lorain County that she is a perfect match for our organization," said Michele Marquis, executive director of Lorain County's Junior Achievement, which teaches youngsters about the free enterprise system.

Rave Reviews offers clients an intimate understanding of management, sales, service and training that can only come from mentorship and real world experience. Rave Reviews: for everything it takes to make good restaurants great.