



NAMEDROPPING:

Bruce and Brian Add Sal's and Harry's to Malone's Family of Restaurants

New Venture Located Just Doors From Other Establishments

BY MATT O'NEIL

Two new restaurants, Sal's Italian Chophouse and Harry's Bar, will open at the Lansdowne Shopping Center in August. In addition to these establishments, actually above them, will be Malone's Banquets. If that name sounds familiar it should. Brian McCarty and Bruce Drake, the brains and the passion behind the wildly successful Malone's in Lansdowne, are the controlling partners in the new ventures as well.

Brian and Bruce opened Malone's six years ago, after beginning a friendship at L & N Seafood, the forerunner to Bruce's Regatta Seafood Restaurant at Lexington Green. Brian became a regular at L & N, and then Regatta, after returning to Lexington from college in Cleveland. After graduating from Western Kentucky's Institutional Management program, Bruce managed L & N for several years before transforming it into its present form.

"Brian was an addict of L & N Seafood," Bruce recalled with a laugh.

"I just thought it was a high quality product," Brian clarified. "I was a big fan of what he did."

Brian spent a lot of time, between all the crab legs and shrimp, picking Bruce's brain about the restaurant business. When an opportunity arose eight years ago for Brian to buy A. P. Suggins on Romany Road, he took it only after consulting with Bruce. Despite the 80-hour weeks, it didn't take him long to become hooked on the restaurant business.

After running Suggins for two years, Brian was approached about opening a new place

in Lansdowne, in a space being vacated by Columbia Steak House. This time he needed Bruce for more than just counsel.

"I wasn't going to do (Malone's) without him," Brian said.

"Regatta was about three years old," Bruce added. "I told him I would help him, and he said, 'No, I don't think you understand. If I do this, I want you to do this with me.'"

Brian and Bruce's friendship extends outside of their business ventures. They both love golf and often travel together. Wherever they go, their passion for good food and good restaurants follow, and Lexington diners are much better off for it.

"We travel all over the country to visit great restaurants, and we learn a lot of ideas and learn a lot of things from different parts of the country," Bruce said. "There's a little piece of a lot of restaurants in everything we build."

The Malone's concept of serving Prime beef, in particular, was born on a trip to Gibson's Steakhouse in Chicago. Brian and Bruce estimate that only 50 or so U. S. cities have restaurants that serve Prime beef. Only two percent of all beef sold in America is graded Prime, resulting in an expensive and volatile market that most restaurateurs steer clear of.

A little more than two years after Malone's opened, Bruce and Brian started Oscar's adjacent to their existing restaurant. The Oscar's concept was also influenced partly by Gibson's, which has a piano bar. However its main influence came from much closer to home.

"We took what we learned at Regatta's," Bruce said.

"People like entertainment," Brian continued. "We have full blown entertainment on the patio seven nights a week at Regatta, and the concept was offer live piano seven nights a week at a seafood and piano bar. We felt like the piano and the upscale seafood (at Oscar's) complimented the steakhouse. It's something that stands on its own and compliments Malone's very well."

It's that kind of symmetry that the two partners are banking on with their new venture. Sal's will be an Italian Chophouse with a casual atmosphere. Its sidekick, Harry's, will be a unique bar and will serve American style pub food.

"Look what Norman Brinker did with Macaroni Grill, Chili's and On the Border," said Bruce. "He owns all three of them, they are three distinct concepts, and he puts them within 100 yards of each other. We believe people go in areas to shop and say, 'Hey, we'll pop in Malone's. If it's busy we may go over to Oscar's. If it's busy we'll go down to Sal's. If it's busy we may go to Harry's.' Surely we're not going to go zero for four."

"If you look at some of the greatest restaurateurs in history, they'll put multiple concepts within the same area," Brian added. "You go to where the people are. Obviously Malone's is the busiest restaurant in town. And we feel like it's a great location with a lot of easy accessible parking at that end of the center"

Lansdowne is clearly a location that Brian

and Bruce have a lot of faith in. Making it there has been especially satisfying for Brian who feels a strong tie to his home area.

"I grew up across the street," he said. "This is my neighborhood. It didn't take me ten minutes to know that when (they) approached me six years ago that this was the spot I wanted to develop."

With two experienced and successful restaurateurs, that decision to grow in Lansdowne goes well beyond sentimentality, though.

"Real estate is very important to us because we invest a lot into our stores," Bruce said. "If you're going to pour that kind of money into a particular site, it should be a site that's worthy of doing that. We like first class stores, with first class amenities, and we want to make sure we do it in first class locations."

The Sal's venture essentially began two years ago when Brian and Bruce began to negotiate with the tenants in that area of the plaza. Initially they were able to secure 4,800 square feet of space. Then later on the project grew bigger when Old Kentucky Candies moved to their current location down the way, next to Baskin Robbins. Satisfied that they could remodel the available 6,000 square feet on the first floor they went ahead. It was only after they began that the project evolved into its current form.

"We were going to build a 6,000 square foot Italian restaurant with a patio," Bruce said. "Then when we got to working on it, the economics of the deal, it was ———→

← going to be just as advantageous for us to scrap the building as it would have been to remodel it. We were able to justify putting a second floor on it, and with all the pressure we were getting (at Malone's) with the two banquet rooms, we said, 'Hey, that's what can we do on the second floor.'"

The second floor will provide as many as nine separate private dining rooms or as few as one, enabling them to accommodate parties as small as ten or as large as 400 (or 300 for a sit down event). All rooms will be equipped with 84-inch screens and other state-of-the-art fiber optic AV capabilities, like satellite tele-conferencing and PowerPoint.

"Malone's (banquet business) has been very successful," Brian said. "We built our first private dining room four years ago. Then,

when we built Oscar's, we built another private dining room. There's a need for private dining space in Lexington. (Our) two rooms are full a lot. So when we had the opportunity to build Sal's, we decided to take advantage of the 8,000 square feet on the second floor and build a banquet room. It's an opportunity for us to let the folks here in the neighborhood take advantage of a private dining facility without having to go out to the interstate to a hotel."

Downstairs, Sal's will seat 175 inside with room for 75 more outside on the patio. The ambiance will be similar to Malone's, classy casual, with a lot of wood, stone and spacious seating. The restaurant will also feature a distinctive wall displaying as many as 400 bottles of Maker's Mark, most of them being collectibles. Patrons will have the chance to "sponsor" the bottle of their

choice, with the proceeds to benefit the Race for Education, a charity founded by WinStar farm owners Bill Casner and Kenny Troutt.

Sharing the downstairs will be Harry's bar, which Brian describes as, "a small neighborhood bar, that will not only compliment Sal's, but also stand on its own two feet and feature darts, cold beer, plasma TV's. There's a lot of neat features in there."

One of those neat features is a racetrack tote board, which will dominate the south wall of the bar. It will show odds on three fictional "dream" races that pit some the best horses in the 100 years against each other. Man o' War is currently the 2-1 favorite over Secretariat in the Classic, and you can get a pretty good price on Winning Colors in the Distaff race.

Brian sold his interest in Suggins soon after Malone's opened, while Bruce has maintained his interest and involvement in Regatta. They share at least 75 percent interest in the five Lansdowne ventures, with various other investors splitting up the remaining shares. Together they also own a stake in six Texas Roadhouse franchises throughout the mid-South, but spend the vast majority of their time with their local ventures.

As for what happens after Sal's, it depends on what happens with Sal's. "We'll look at Lexington a year from now once we've had a chance to see how Lexington takes to Sal's and Harry's and Malone's Banquets," Brian said. "Then we'll determine whether the next step is to grow with another one in Lexington."