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## Evolving Business While Keeping Tradition Alive

Wisconsin has enjoyed a long love affair with its Supper Clubs. You might say the state was an incubator of sorts for the (still popular) dining tradition, now nearing its eightieth year. According to the State Historical Society, it was Milwaukee native Lawrence Frank who owned and operated the first official Supper Club in the U.S., in post-prohibition Beverly Hills, Ca. Frank established what was to become staples of the traditional Supper Club menu (prime rib, mashed potatoes, creamed corn and the always popular relish tray), and is also credited with introducing the "doggie bag" to American diners. More importantly, Frank insisted on maintaining a classy atmosphere for his patrons, ensuring white linen service and personal attention to every table.

Those traditions stuck. At a time when fast-food and chain restaurants have all but eclipsed the American gastronomy landscape, Wisconsin's Supper Clubs have endured. The menu may have progressed a bit from those early days, but the food is still of the highest quality and the prices competitive enough to keep drawing crowds year after year. At my own Supper Club, (River's Bend, in Howard), prime rib is still the most popular item on the menu. American cuisine still reigns supreme, but we've expanded our offerings to include seafood, and a smattering of French and Italian fare to complement the traditional menu.

Like most every business rooted in tradition, the Supper Club has had to evolve in order to survive. We've had to look for ways to expand our offerings and appeal to new customers while remaining true to our heritage and to our loyal clientele. That means banquet rooms now serve double duty as space for business meetings. We've also added a weekend buffet, happy hour, Sunday brunch, daily luncheon service, and we bring in live entertainment several nights a week. We've created a website and a Facebook fan page, published our menu online, and created a VIP club to reward customers on special occasions.

The old Supper Club isn't what it used to be. It's more. Some would say, better. Because, through all this evolution, we've never lost sight of the things that make us who we are, and keep our customers coming back: Personalized service, great food, relaxed atmosphere, and a commitment to bringing tangible value to the customer. At the end of the day, that's really all any business has to accomplish to be successful.

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