**Designing the Courthouse Pub, a Manitowoc staple**

A few weeks ago, I received an invitation from an old friend, John Jagemann from Manitowoc, to attend his retirement party. Looking at the invitation, I was lost for a long while, just staring at the invitation.

Oh my gosh, my dear friend has decided to retire after all these years. Well, come to think of it, that wasn’t that many years ago that he started this venture. Maybe it was 15 years ago? A blink of an eye, time has passed and now he is retiring, passing his successful baton to the next generation.

Fifteen years, my goodness. How time flies!

In Manitowoc, Courthouse Pub is a household word. You cannot visit Manitowoc without having lunch or dinner at "The Pub," so your trip can be considered complete.

John Jagemann is the proud owner of the Pub and I happen to be the consultant who helped him put the concept together 15 years ago. What fond memories indeed.

I got this call from a stranger, who said he was in the process of opening a restaurant, and was interviewing for a consultant who could help him with the concept. Would I be interested, he asked. Well, I’d been doing consulting work for years; and this time, I wouldn't have to move my family across the country.

So I gladly obliged, and a beautiful friendship blossomed.

The location of the new restaurant was right across from the courthouse (hence the name Courthouse Pub, clever devil he is). It was an old run-down inn that John wanted to convert to a modern restaurant. Then came the bad news and good news.

The bad news was the building was so deteriorated it would cost a fortune to renovate it, and the good news was to just tear it down and start from scratch. There’s where I came in, to design a workable restaurant with the "workflow" that I’ve been preaching – where to receive the food, where to store it properly, where to prep them, and where to cook them, and how to serve it in an efficient manner.

It was a dream for me.

We met at the old site and introduced ourselves. My first question was, “John, let me check between your ears, why on earth you want to open a restaurant? Do you know what you’re getting into?” He smiled at me and said, “Pete, that has been my dream when I was a kid, to have a restaurant serving great food, and entertain visiting families and friends; and oh, be the gathering place for all the locals.”

John has lived in Manitowoc all his life; the whole community is familiar with the industrious Jagemann family. So now, he decided to jump from the pan to the fire, with no hesitation.

What am I going to say? When he told me about his dream restaurant, to have a deli up front, a drive-thru on the side, a pub with home brew, a steakhouse, and oh, a seafood place with flown-in daily specials!

I looked at him and muttered a question that I remember till this day, “John, who are you?” Just those three words, we have become friends, and he hired me on the spot.

I helped him identify his goals and dreams. Courthouse Pub is going to be a gathering place for families and friends, serving the greatest foods with the friendliest service, in an unforgettable ambiance. That’s who we are, and after 15-plus years, Courthouse Pub has become the household word in the community.

No, no deli with special cheese and sausages, and no drive-thru with foods in bags or cartons. I still have the menu that we used when we first opened. The menu has been modified many times to meet the market changes.

Yet, the original concept is still there – take the freshest ingredients from the local market to make something extraordinary and special to intrigue the taste buds. Wow those folks with different colors of vegetables; wow them with creative sauces and cooking methods; and wow them with aromas that they never dreamed of – garlic, leeks, rosemary, thyme…

Take grandma’s cooking to another level!

So, John decided to tear down the old place and start from scratch. It was amazing watching the old building being bulldozed down. Hundred years of history, gone in half an hour; and a new era began.

His cousin Bob Jagemann happened to be an architect, so naturally John asked him to help design the new restaurant. Based on the appearance of the old building, Bob came up with a new model that was modernized, yet still captured the old flair of the glorious past. The model actually won an award for its creativity and authenticity. Another medal on the lapel!

I actually had the pleasure of designing the whole restaurant layout from scratch. That was the most challenging project yet; as in other projects, I will design the “flow” of an already existing facility. Yet, this one is what I think the “flow” should be.

Yes, we ordered the foods from the purveyors, but where do they drop them off? Where to keep them? Where to prep the food, and where to store it afterward? Then where to cook it, and how to serve it to the dining guests? And how to get the dirty dishes back in the kitchen so they’ll be cleaned and ready for the next wave?

I preached about the “workflow” in my classes – the cycle of purchasing, delivery, storage, prepping, cooking, serving and cleaning. It was time to put them all in actual blueprints.

So many details that a lot of folks overlooked when designing a restaurant – is the kitchen adequate to serve a large dining room? Or vice versa? How many tables are needed? Just how big can a menu be? What kind of foods are served, and what equipment is needed

I’ve worked with different owners earlier that were "trigger happy" when they went to restaurant equipment auctions. They would buy a bunch of stuff that they thought was at a great price, but had no use for serving the foods on the menu.

So I helped with designing the kitchen, dining room, office, and even the employee rest area. It was a lot of work, but it was a dream come true. Last but not least was the menu. It was such a hit, that folks would drive miles to try our foods.

We’ll talk about that more later.

*Peter Kwong’s book “Wok & Roll” is available at phkwong.com*