



MICHAEL'S CAFÉ

A TIMONIUM LANDMARK TURNS 40!

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Michael's Café is a family-owned and operated bar and restaurant that is thriving in two Baltimore County locations, Timonium and White Marsh-Middle River. In 1984, The Dellis family opened the doors of the Timonium site, and family patriarch Michael Del-

lis endeavored to give locals something they were lacking. In recognition of this success, Michael's Café is our latest pick to be featured in our ongoing series on bars, restaurants, and taverns around the Maryland-D.C. area to be named after their owners, families, or a specific person.

**Steven, LoAnn
and Michael Dellis**
Michael's Café



Steven Dellis, who currently runs Michael's Café with his sister, said during a recent interview with the Beverage Journal, "This place started as a dark, dingy bar back in '84. We had 60 seats. It was a rough-around-the-edges neighborhood kind of place. But my father's intentions were to put his mother's crab cakes on the menu along with some really good food. It was an immediate success. And over the years, we've gradually built to what's now a 400-seat restaurant with three bars, sever-

al dining rooms, and an outside patio that includes one of those bars. I like to say you can go bar-hopping right here, because each bar has its own kind of feel."

The crab cakes with the secret family recipe remain. But now the menu also features prime steaks, homemade soups,

an array of sandwiches, and a weekend brunch. "Our dining rooms are great for date nights or any kind of celebration," stated Dellis. "People are celebrating all of the time here, whether its 50-year anniversaries or first dates."

The family opened the second location

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And is Michael still with us? *"Absolutely!" exclaimed his similarly entrepreneurial son, Steven. "I'm 47 and he'll be 77 soon ... He is still very much active ... he keeps us on our toes."*

in 2019 where they occupy 9,900 square feet in the Greenleigh at Crossroads town center just off Interstate 95 and Route 43. Each Michael's Café offers happy hour deals from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, and every first Friday in Timonium there is live music.

Dellis said he definitely feels a heightened responsibility to continue "making good" with his dad's name on the front of the business. He remarked, "We're three generations into it now, and we're constantly looking to improve things. My father along with the rest of my family have built a great business. He has always had high standards in terms of the quality of the food, the service, and so forth. My sister and I are running things now, and we don't want to let down the family name."

And is Michael still with us? "Absolute-

ly!" exclaimed his similarly entrepreneurial son. "I'm 47 and he'll be 77 soon at the end of August. He is still very much active. Not like he was before. But he keeps us on our toes."

In addition to the crab cakes and other fine eats, Michael's Café has become known for its impressive beverage menu. "I like to think we have something for everyone's tastes," stated Dellis. "We have an extensive wine list, plus a lot of great ryes, whiskeys, single malts, and everything else in between. Our cocktail program, I think, is one of the best around and we change it seasonally. We don't have one particular signature drink that stands out. But a couple that remain on the menu are our Old Fashioned and our Manhattan. Currently, one of my favorite drinks is a nod to our Greek heritage. It's called a Wayfinder and has such ingredients as metaxa ouzo, apricot liqueur, elderberry syrup, fresh lime, and orange bitters. It's super well-balanced."

He continued, "Our beverage philosophy is 'let's empower our staff with all the knowledge we can.' We're constantly testing them on our cocktail program, our wine program, and so forth. They have to have a great knowledge of what we do

have. And then we tell them to get to know the customer, see what their preferences are. From there, they can steer them in various directions. We also have some really great mocktails."

Having been in the bar and restaurant business most of his adult life, Dellis says the favorite part of his work – that which keeps him interested and engaged – is watching team members grow. Joshua Vorke, the general manager in the Middle River store, has been with the Dellis family for over 20 years. "He started as a busboy!" said Dellis with more than a bit of glee. "I consider him a brother at this point. It's stories like his that keep me inspired, keep me motivated. Our beverage manager, Mickey, started as a barback, and he runs our entire beverage program with me and



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also runs all of our social media and marketing.”

At the same time, one of the Dellis family’s great and lingering challenges also has to do with staffing. Dellis noted, “We have a lot of great people. But finding those people has been a little bit tougher in the last two or three years than it was before. Aside from that, one of the biggest obstacles we deal with is the inflation aspect of things. Sometimes, customers don’t understand why things are priced the way they are. But a lot of restaurants over the past couple of years have kept prices down by cutting quality and reducing portion sizes. That’s something I will never entertain! Quality is first. I would guess 90 percent of our customers get it, and what we’re all about. But it’s challenging.”

Because he has had several employees rise through the ranks to take on management responsibilities, Dellis is a good man to hit up for career advice. After all, a lot of busboys, barbacks, waiters, and waitresses read the Beverage Journal each month, and

probably more than a few dream of owning their own bar and/or restaurant one day – maybe even one that has their name on it.

Dellis remarked, “I’d tell them that it’s important to stick to your core values. Quality and service first, and never ever cut corners. That’s my biggest philosophy. But, first and foremost, make sure you are passionate about it! If you don’t have the passion for this business, it can wear on you. It’s a rollercoaster, and there will be a lot of ups and downs. Just learn to embrace it all, every part of the journey.”

Looking ahead to the remainder of 2024, is Dellis optimistic or pessimistic as to where we’re all headed? He was quick to reply: “I am a bit of both. It’s a big election year, and there is a lot of anxiety. Consumer spending habits, in general, tend to change somewhat when there is a big election like this. That impacts business. Either way, change is coming, and I will try to get excited for that change. Because with change, there is always opportunity.”



Steven Dellis of Michael's Café



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