

CARDONE BLEU

Ray Knight's

Where *everything* is good, from sandwiches to specials

by Mike Cardone

TIME WAS when I thought Knight's Restaurant, on Dexter across from Vet's Park, was the best-kept secret in Ann Arbor. Raymond quietly bought the old Annie's Dugout, put untold amounts of money into its remodeling, transformed it from an after-game refreshment center for ballplayers to a fine restaurant that is difficult to talk about without using superlatives. Raymond, the modern counterpart of Harry Bailly, Chaucer's "genial host" of *The Canterbury Tales*, certainly didn't do much advertising for this latest entity in his Knight's Enterprises, but obviously he didn't have to. The word gets around when a new place worthy of note opens up, and for this restaurant the word spread rapidly. Knight's is not a fancy place. It's just a very comfortable, roomy, sometimes noisy, and always pleasant place to enjoy the best drinks, the best specials, the best steaks, and the best prices in a very wide area. We have eaten there on so many occasions that I cannot number them, and I haven't had anything but praise for each and every one of them. You might think

I've said it all right here, but do read on for particulars.

Ray Knight, the same one whose grocery store supplies Ann Arbor's fussiest consumers with the best meats you can get anywhere, wanted to expand his expertise in the food service area, so he bought a restaurant.

That's the way he does things. He was already well regarded as a caterer, so this was simply a reasonable extension. He takes great pride in being the best, and he works very hard at it. He is always on hand, in his trademark white shirt and tie, greeting all of the many regulars by name, circulating among the tables, going in and out of the kitchen to see that everything is running smoothly, and being generally what he has always been—a hard-working businessman and a very nice, very generous human being. He may take some rare time off on Wednesdays during the summer to play golf with good friends Red Fraser of Fraser's Pub, Jack Wright of Alpine Glass (right next door), retired Ann Arbor policeman Marv Dann, or one of his own sons, but mostly Raymond works at satisfying his customers. And though he doesn't play much golf anymore, I have learned never to accept a press bet from him—he still plays a far-better-than-average game. If you're a first-time visitor there, Raymond may not know you by name, but if you introduce yourself to him, I'll guarantee that he'll know you the next time you show up.

When you walk into the restaurant you first have to greet the ten or 15 people you know that you seem to find there whenever you show for lunch or dinner. Then you can sit either in the main dining area, in the brand new sunny and smokeless addition, or, if there is a crowd, in the upstairs room, built especially for private parties and overflow crowds. Even in the main dining area the ceilings are so high that non-smokers are not uncomfortable.

When it comes time to order your drinks and food, I really can't make any special recommendations. Believe me, *everything* is good, from sandwiches to specials, to fixed-menu items. Ray-

mond's specials can be anything from fried jumbo shrimp, to beef stews, to roast prime sirloin of beef, to fresh catches of walleye, to perch—and on and on it goes. The prices range from \$5.95 to \$10.95, and that is for the whole dinner, including salad, potato, vegetable, and a basket of rolls. The fixed menu includes two of the biggest and juiciest boneless pork chops you have ever had; a veal dish that will knock your palate for a loop; fork-tender and perfectly done steaks that you would have a hard time duplicating almost anywhere else, and a number of other dishes. Raymond serves only the freshest of ingredients in everything. His salads are crisp and cold and are served on a flat plate with your choice of dressing. My own favorite is the house dressing. He serves fresh asparagus in season, a lot of it. He recently had, flown up from Florida and picked up at the Metro Airport, the sweetest corn that I expect to eat until Farmer Grant starts picking his in August. For those who need something to complain about, the baked potatoes are wrapped in foil. My own thinking on that is that, since you're sitting right there, all you have to do is remove it. For you lovers of shrimp, Raymond's shrimp are another earner of superlatives. They are the biggest, most flavorful, perfectly cooked, firmest shrimp you will get in a shrimp cocktail. They are of a size that most restaurants stuff as a main dish. Jumbo shrimp is not an oxymoron here.

I suppose I could go on, but what's the point? If you want it all, take your wife (please), take your sweetheart, take your kids, your parents—anyone—and give everybody a treat at Knight's on Dexter Avenue across from the park. Plenty of parking, all plastic accepted, great food, great drinks. Open for lunch and dinner. Kitchen closes at 11 p.m.; closed Sundays. Finally, if you are ever lucky enough to get reservations for a football Saturday brunch, grab it—it's (Am I allowed one more superlative?) the best around. □

MIKE CARDONE regularly reviews restaurants for the magazine.