



"Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one." -Jane Howard

WILDWOOD by-the-sea: Nostalgia & Recipes

Russo's RESTAURANT (1922-2008)

"BRAGIOLE" is an excerpt from the forthcoming book
"Wildwood-By-The-Sea: Nostalgia and Recipes" by Anita Hirsch



Joseph and Elizabeth Russo



Russo's circa 1950s



Russo's circa 1960s

Russo's, one of the oldest restaurants in Wildwood, closed in 2008 after 86 years. Elizabeth and Joseph Russo, his brother Sam (Tootsie) and brother Ray settled in Wildwood because it reminded them of their Italian home by the Adriatic Sea. Ray opened the Golden Dragon Restaurant at Roberts and Park Blvd. Elizabeth, Joseph and Tootsie bought land on the corner of Davis and Park Blvd. They opened the Brass Rail next to the corner and started selling cold drinks and lunches to those visiting across the street at Ottens Harbor. Joe's son-in-law, Santo Clement operated a drug store on the corner.

At that time, in the 1920's, Ottens Harbor was where illegal liquor was brought in and whiskey especially could be smuggled into the country. "Bootleg" liquor was sold in the bar at the Brass Rail.

Tootsie worked on the railroad, helping to install tracks in the evening. Until prohibition was repealed, he brought in rum to make extra money during prohibition.

In the 1940's the Russo's decided to expand. Joe felt the restaurant should be on the corner so they opened the Gingham Club on the corner. It had a full bar and a dining room as well. Delicious home-cooked style meals were served. There was entertainment and even free spaghetti some nights. Entertainers appearing in local night spots would stop at the Gingham Club for a meal or pizza. For \$2.00 you could get a full course steak dinner.

In 1962, there was a hurricane and flood which did a lot of damage to the Gingham Club. The family rebuilt the restaurant and changed the name to Russo's Restaurant; they decided they should use their own name. People who remember the Gingham Club, still refer to Russo's Restaurant as the Gingham Club.

The family was important to the Russo's. A family history was written on the menu. A family tree was displayed prominently on the back dining room wall.

Russo's specialty was home cooked foods. All of the Russo children and grandchildren were involved in the business at one time or another. They learned the recipes and cooking methods of Mom Elizabeth Russo. "There was always a Russo on the premises to oversee details," says daughter Rae.

Joe and Elizabeth sold the restaurant to their children: daughters Rae and Moffie and son Joseph for one dollar. Joseph and his daughter Amy Coleman, and Rae and her sons Rick and Scott Santaniello ran the business. They sold it in 2008 to Chuck Burns who is rebuilding it as the Ice House.

Thank you to Amy Coleman, Rae Santaniello, Wildwood Historical Museum



Elizabeth & Sam "Tootsie" Russo



Scott Santaniello & Paula



Rick Santaniello

Bragiole, or beef rolls, was "the best recipe" we served says Rae Santaniello. Guests would call before they came to see if the Bragiole was on the menu that night.

In the restaurant they would make a paste of the stuffing ingredients and spread it on the beef, but Rae remembers her mom used a filling with chopped eggs and sausage. Rae said "that you can get the beef at an Italian market and they will know how to cut it if you tell them you want it for Bragiole."

The recipe can be doubled.

BRAGIOLE

- 3 c. tomato sauce
- 1 lb. beef flank steak, pounded to 1/4" thick
(will measure about 8"x 10")
- 1 1/4 c. flavored croutons
(or 6 tbsp. flavored bread crumbs)
- 1/3 c. grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 eggs
- 1 tbsp. chopped fresh Italian parsley
- 1 tbsp. chopped fresh oregano
- 1 tsp. finely chopped rosemary
- 1 tsp. finely chopped thyme
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- Olive oil for brushing
- Salt and pepper
- 1-2 tbsp. canola oil for searing

Preheat the oven to 350°. Pour the 3 cups of tomato sauce in a 9" x 13" baking dish and place in the oven to heat.

In the bowl of food processor, combine the croutons, parmesan, eggs, parsley, oregano, rosemary, thyme and garlic until it resembles chunky bread crumbs or almost a paste. Brush the meat with olive oil and season with the salt and pepper. Spread the filling evenly over the meat. Roll tightly and tie with butcher's string or hold together with wooden toothpicks.

In a large sauté pan, heat 1-2 tablespoons of canola oil. Add the roll and sear on all sides. Remove the roll from the pan and place over the hot tomato sauce in the pan in the oven. Cover with tin foil so that the foil is not touching the meat. Bake (braise) for one hour or until tender and cooked through.

Yield: 4 servings

"If you have some nostalgia or a recipe to share with Anita, e-mail her at AHFitpower@aol.com"



After the 1988 Hurricane Gloria passed through town, Amy Russo holds SLOW! NO WAKE sign for passers by. Other family members in photo are Bianca Russo on left and Joe in front



After 86 years Russo's Restaurant & Bar closed its doors for good. This was the final night on November 19, 2008 Veronica, Terry M, Cyndi, Rhonda, Ann, Susie, Paula, Felix, Freddie, Amy, Teri S, Pat & Joe, Sandy, Omar (sitting)