



HAPPY'S PLACE

BY RICH BELMONT



In 1956 Freeman Hancock and his wife, Doris, purchased a small bar on Rockdale Road in Dubuque. Freeman's nickname was "Happy" so they renamed the bar Happy's Place. Six years later they sold it to their son, Jack Hancock and his wife Gayle. After twenty six years Jack and Gayle sold it to their nephew, Mark Hancock and his wife Pauline who operated Happy's Place for another twenty six years.

Over those fifty eight years the Hancock family kept improving and expanding the business. It went from being a bar to a bar and restaurant to a bar, restaurant and the area's premier banquet hall.



In December, 2014 Andy and Kristin (Leonard) Bertsch purchased Happy's Place. Andy and Lauren Leonard, Kristin's sister, handle the day to day operations and Kristin manages the business end. Andy and Kristin must believe in the old adage "if it ain't broke don't fix it." That's because Happy's Place continues to be the same as

it was during the 58 years before them. In fact, it can be said Happy's Place is still run in the tradition of the Hancock family. Kristin worked there from age 14 until she was 22. Lauren is the Kitchen Manager, who also started working there when she was 14 and has been with the restaurant for ten years already.

Even though the Hancock's no longer own the business, they still have an active role in the daily operation. Mark and his brother, Kenny, are present daily and Pauline is only a phone call away assisting whenever needed.

The banquet hall consists of two private dining rooms and one of those can be divided. There are three large bars with available bartenders and a dance floor with bandstand. Total occupancy is 454 people so it is not unusual to find there are dinners going on in one or more rooms several times each week.

Andy, Kristin and Lauren are experienced in offering party planning assistance for both buffet and family style dinners. They host wedding receptions; funeral dinners; banquets for anniversaries, business and club meetings; and company and class reunions almost on a daily basis.



Lauren prepares the food. She is an extremely talented cook and has been cooking at Happy's Place since she was 18. She also had the advantage of being trained by experts: former owners Gayle Hancock and Pauline Hancock. Lauren and her kitchen staff prepare daily sandwiches, soups and salads and delicious luncheon specials. At the same time she is often cooking up exquisite banquets for up to 300 people!

At this point I should mention you need not be concerned if you arrive at Happy's Place and the parking lot looks full. There could be over 100 cars parked there but you will find you will always be offered a table or be able to take a seat at the bar.



Andy and Kristin are also continuing the tradition of Happy's involvement in community affairs. They do many fund raising activities, trivia events and church breakfasts throughout the year.

They are particularly proud of their hosting of the annual fundraiser for Research For

The Kids (RFTK) (dbqrftk.com). This organization raises funds for brain tumor and heart defect research programs at



the University of Iowa Children's Hospital. To date, RFTK has contributed almost \$571,000 for this research.

The bar menu is a complete listing of tasty soups, salads and sandwiches. All these items are available at lunchtime and during dinner hours.



The quarter pound hamburgers are made from 80/20 Ground Chuck. The extra fat content makes the burgers a little sweeter and juicier. According to the menu burgers are available with cheese, bacon and mushrooms. Andy told me you can request other ingredients, like olives, hot sauce, and different cheeses if you are looking for a little more variety. The Carmichael is an exceptionally flavorful specially seasoned beef patty usually accompanied by grilled onions and Swiss cheese. Then there is the Steak Sandwich



which is a chopped sirloin served with grilled onions and mushrooms. The Bacon Wrapped Hot Dog is just a wiener but bacon wrapped around it makes it a real treat. Speaking of treats, the Chili this time of year is so satisfying. They make a rich powerful sauce with pinto beans and large quantities of ground beef.

I noticed many ladies like to order salads. You can choose Ham, Chicken, Egg or Tuna Salad. If you prefer the ones with greens you can choose Grilled Chicken, Buffalo Chicken or Chef Salad to munch on.



My favorite sandwich here is without a doubt the Pork Tenderloin. Six ounce fresh pork tenderloin is hand coated with a specially seasoned breading. Then it is deep fried and served on a fresh bun with mayo, lettuce and onion. I ask for mine with onion, pickles and mustard and then I chew slowly savoring every juicy bite!

Happy's Place perfected the Pork Tenderloin many years ago. In fact, Mark and Pauline Hancock were honored by the Iowa Pork Producers' Association as 2nd Place Winner of the 2010 Best Breaded Pork Tenderloin contest.



While there are some standouts on the menu, make no mistake, the regulars keep coming back for the Daily Luncheon Specials. The most popular is the Baked Chicken Dinner available every Wednesday. The chicken is dipped in flour batter, fried, then baked and served with mashed potatoes, gravy and corn. There are standard Friday Specials too. They are:

Goulash - ground beef browned with onions, celery and green peppers (The Holy Trinity!) along with tomato sauce, stewed tomatoes, mushrooms and homemade seasoning blend.

Tuna Noodle - No-yolk egg noodles, tuna, cream of mushroom soup and milk baked with a topping of potato chips and butter.



Spaghetti - Covered in a homemade meat sauce. In the USA this popular dish is called Spaghetti Bolognese and I must say I enjoyed it in this "non-Italian" restaurant very much. The sauce is tomato based with the addition of copious amounts of ground beef.

Every Friday during Lent is Fried or Baked Cod day. The fish is hand breaded and served with fried potatoes. These are not French fries. Fresh Idaho potatoes are sliced and baked before being lightly fried.



On Tuesdays and Thursdays the Luncheon Specials are Chef's choice. They are always fabulous! For instance you might find Roast Beef and Mashed Potatoes. The beef is so tender because it is roasted for 10 hours and the potatoes are mashed from real potatoes. Or perhaps it is your lucky day and Lauren has prepared Swiss Steak. In this dish tenderized

Top Round which is always fresh, never frozen, is dredged in homemade flour breading, then grilled on the flat top. Then it is oven baked in beef broth, house seasonings and mushrooms. Lauren's recipe does not call for tomatoes which is just the way I prefer it.

By the way, how many of you know Swiss Steak did not originate in Switzerland? Yeah, I know, right? The Swiss Steak name comes from the term "swissing". It's a procedure of softening the meat by beating it with a tenderizing hammer or rolling it between a set of bladed rollers.

It's also a lucky day when you find Pepper Steak. This is made from the same tenderized Top Round. It's coated in homemade flour breading then browned on the flat top, then cooked in a homemade seasoning blend along with green peppers, stewed tomatoes, beef broth and covered with a thickened beef broth gravy.

Other Luncheon Specials you might find are Meatball Sandwiches, BBQ Ribs, Baked Smoked Ham, Polish Sausages, Chicken Pot Pie, Beef Stew, Meat Loaf, Roast Pork and Dressing, Beef Tips and Noodles or Reuben Sandwiches.



I would be remiss if I didn't mention Happy's Place sensational pies. Each morning at least 6 to 8 flavors of pies are baked from scratch. Lemon Meringue, Coconut Cream and Apple pies are baked

every day. Other possible choices are blueberry, cherry, peach, pecan, or chocolate pies or possibly even HoHo cake. These are sold by the slice and every day the staff serves over eleven pies. They go quickly so it's best to arrive early for lunch or you might miss out on your slice of the pie!

HAPPY'S PLACE

2323 Rockdale Road, Dubuque, IA 52003
563-556-9734 • HappysPlaceDubuque.com

Hours: Bar: Tue-Sat: 11 AM-Close;
Kitchen: Lunch: Tue-Sat: 11 AM-1:45 PM;
Dinner: Tue-Sat: 6-9 PM; Sun-Mon: Closed

Dining Style: Come as you are

Noise Level: Conversational

Recommendations: All Daily Luncheon Specials especially Baked Chicken, Swiss Steak and Spaghetti; Bacon Double Cheeseburger; Pork Tenderloin; Carmichael; Bacon Wrapped Hot Dog; Steak Sandwich; Chili; Pies Baked Daily

Liquor Service: Full Bar

Prices: \$2.00-\$8.50

Pay Options: Cash, Debit, All Credit Cards except AMEX, ATM on premises

Accessibility: South Entrance Double Doors - Separate Accessible Restroom

Kids Policy: Menu-No, High Chair-Yes, Booster-Yes

Reservations: Yes • **Catering:** Yes, Pick-up or On

Premises Only • **Take Out:** Yes • **Delivery:** No

Parking: Huge Private Lot