

THE MORACCO SUPPER CLUB

BY RICH BELMONT



I suppose most people in Dubuque are familiar with The Moracco, one of the few remaining supper clubs in Iowa. But I wonder how many know the main dining room was once a couple of service bays for large trucks!

When the Moracco Truck Stop opened in 1945 in the Grandview Heights district of Dubuque, Rockdale Road was Old Route 151, a major truck route. It was a 24 hour diner and truck repair center. It was nearly destroyed by a devastating fire in the early 1950's but was rebuilt and continued operating as a truck stop until 1958.

The original owner was stationed in the Kingdom of Morocco in North Africa while in the US Army. When he returned he decided to open a truck center and named it in remembrance of his time in that country. However, he apparently didn't remember how to spell Morocco!

In 1958 The Moracco was sold to Armin (Butch) and Genevive (Whitey) Herbst who operated it as a successful supper club. Butch passed away in 1966. One of his regular customers was Bert Hillary, who farmed about 5 miles south of Dubuque along Highway 52. He figured he would help Butch's widow out so he drove his tractor over to The Moracco and offered Whitey half the purchase price she was asking. To his surprise she accepted so Bert suddenly found himself in the restaurant business. He figured he could learn how to be a bartender and his wife Hazel had some experience as a waitress at Leiser's Supper Club north of Dubuque. Besides, Hazel loved to cook and he knew their five daughters could take care of the kitchen.

Jeanne was one of those daughters. When her parents purchased The Moracco in 1966 she was only eleven years old. She was just a kid but soon found she was cooking alongside her mother and sisters.



↑ Tim, Jeanne, and Garry Heiar

Jeanne and her husband Garry Heiar, who also grew up on a farm, became partners in The Moracco in 1976. They still use Hazel Hillary's legacy recipes with her handwritten notes on them.

And just as Jeanne grew up in the restaurant business so have Garry and Jeanne's children. Tim is now Business Partner and General Manager of The Moracco. His two brothers and sister still help out when they have the time. Greg is Assistant Men's Basketball Coach at Wichita State University. Nick is a Financial Advisor at Honkamp Krueger Financial Services. Hillary is Epicor Eclipse Integration Trainer/Consultant (whatever that is), at Crescent Electric Supply. Even Tim's wife, Anne, is involved in the restaurant.

Garry and Jeanne are obviously doing all the right things. They have now been operating one of the most successful restaurants in Dubuque for over 39 years. They continue all the traditions of the supper club by serving excellent American cuisine in a fine dining environment. The staff, including servers Christy, Meagan, Scott and Terry who served me or my tasting crew, is friendly and knowledgeable; the menu offers a delightful variety of steaks and seafood; and the ambience including linen tablecloths is a bit classy. (Fun fact: Moracco has over 1000 linen napkins dry cleaned every week).

Recently a 3rd dining room was added so now at least 160 people can be seated comfortably. Free Wifi is also available: the password is 1413 Rockdale Road.

The Iowa Restaurant Association recognized Garry and Jeanne Heiar as their 2006 Restaurateurs of the Year. This

award only goes to restaurant owners who exhibit originality, quality and exceptional service to their customers.

The Moracco was one of the 24 Supper Clubs featured in The Supper Club Book written by Dave Hoekstra and published in 2013. (**TheSupperClubBook.com**). If you would like one of these books they are available for purchase at The Moracco.



For years the relish tray on your table was one of the indicators you were in a supper club. Only a very few clubs still provide this because the kitchen staff must get rid of all the celery, carrots, radishes,

cheese and meat spreads left over from each table (86'd in restaurant lingo). So while The Moracco can no longer offer the vegetables they still serve you homemade Ham Salad, Chicken Salad, Liver Pâté and their own homemade Cheese Spread. All of these are superb. The cheese spread is especially creamy. It is made with sour cream, cheddar cheese and a little cream cheese whipped for 45 minutes.

You will enjoy all these spreads on crackers from the unusually large assortment in the basket brought to your table. You will find saltines, bread sticks, and Ritz, Wheat and Club crackers.



The Moracco is well known for Tuesday Special Chicken Dinners. The chicken is hand coated with a proprietary flour breading and then fried in a high pressure Broaster. The chicken is moist and the skin is delicious and not the least bit greasy. On Tuesday

Chicken Dinner night Pickled Chicken Gizzards are also served. These are one of those foods you either love or hate. But I can tell you The Moracco's gizzards are quite tasty.

Gizzards, by the way, are muscular organs found in the digestive tracts of all birds and some other animals as well. Since birds don't have teeth they eat their food whole. Many birds also swallow small stones or sand that finds its way to their gizzards where the food they have eaten gets ground up.

A Moracco platter is an excellent way to sample a variety of the appetizers. You will notice there are a couple of unusual ones: the Steak Bites is an 8 oz. filet cut into cubes and fried; the Fish Bites are pieces of cod prepared to your liking: fried, broiled or grilled.

All Beef is USDA Choice. It is hand cut and cooked on a flat top. The New York Strip, T-Bone and Ribeye Steaks are all outstanding. I particularly enjoy the Beef Tenderloin. I recommend you always order this delicious piece of meat wrapped in bacon. The tenderloin is the tenderest cut of beef but since it doesn't contain much fat marbling it is not as flavorful as other steaks. So a good restaurant either wraps it in good quality bacon or serves it with a sauce.



Now the Prime Rib Saturday Night Special is full of rich beefy flavor all by itself. It is seasoned for two days and then slow roasted for three and a half hours.

The Roast Beef is also splendid. It is usually offered for private party Family Style Dinners. However, so many regular customers insist on ordering it so you can get it as the Monday Special. Inside round cuts of beef are slow roasted for three and a half hours then served with homemade gravy, mashed potatoes, vegetables and salad.

Do you recall I mentioned Hazel Hillary's legacy recipes she first used in 1966 and Jeanne still cooks from today? Well here are a few of them:

Homemade Onion Rings – hand dipped in a special batter.



Beef Tips – tenderloin tips browned, then simmered for two hours in tomato sauce, beef base, sherry wine, garlic, sautéed celery and onions, mushrooms, butter and brown sugar.



Salisbury Steak – super fresh 85/15 ground beef mixed with finely ground onions and garlic and hand shaped into a patty.



Swiss Steak – pounded and marinated round steak dredged in flour and browned, then cooked in a sauce of tomatoes, tomato sauce, peppers, onions, celery, bay leaves, margarine, thyme, garlic powder and brown sugar.

The list of Seafood Specialties is impressive. You can order the Seafood Dinner: a sampler of scallops, shrimp, lobster and cod. Or feast on Lobster Tail, Crab Legs, Frog Legs, Scallops, Atlantic Salmon or Catfish.



My favorite was the splendid shrimp: I have had them as a Shrimp Cocktail and in Scampi and this week I will have them fried. I call these no muss, no fuss shrimp. The kitchen staff deveins and removes all the tails so all I have to do is pop them in my mouth!



Speaking of seafood, Friday is always busy because of the Cod Fish Special. OK, and Saturday is always busy because of the Prime Rib Special. But I know many of the regulars visit on Friday and Saturday nights for one of my all-time favorites not available anywhere else. I am talking about the Broasted Iowa Chop! It is a sumptuous, magnificent, thick center-cut pork chop coated with a special breading then deep fried under high pressure. In my opinion, you haven't had the best Iowa Chop until you have tasted The Moracco's!



After your excellent dinner continue the supper club tradition by enjoying one of The Moracco's fabulous ice cream drinks. I recently sampled a Brandy Alexander (cognac and Crème de Cacao) and a Grasshopper (Crème de menthe and Crème de Cacao). Or perhaps you would prefer a Charlie Brown, Pink Squirrel or Golden Cadillac!

THE MORACCO SUPPER CLUB

1413 Rockdale Road, Dubuque, IA 52003
563-582-2947 • MoraccoDBQ.com

Hours: Bar: Mon-Sat: 4 PM-2 AM;

Kitchen: Mon-Sat: 4 PM-2 AM; Sunday: Closed

Dining Style: Casual

Noise Level: Conversational

Recommendations: Shrimp Cocktail, Fish Bites, Steak Bites, New York Strip, T-Bone Steak, Beef Tenderloin with Bacon, Beef Tips, Swiss Steak, Broasted Chicken, Broasted Iowa Chop, Salisbury Steak, Prime Rib (Saturday only), Grilled Salmon, Lobster Tail, Fried or Scampi Shrimp, Friday Fish Fry, Ice Cream Drinks

Liquor Service: Premium Bar

Prices: \$7.00-\$36.00

Pay Options: Cash, Debit, MasterCard, Visa, Discover, AMEX

Accessibility: Front Door and Restroom

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

Reservations: Yes • **Catering:** Yes

Take Out: Yes • **Delivery:** No

Parking: Large Private Lot