

EST. 1972

← CAESAR'S →

STEAKHOUSE X COCKTAIL BAR



ICONIC RESTAURANT CELEBRATES

the Ritual of Dining for 50 years

by Rennay Craats with photos by Riverwood photography

Above: Gerry Stuart, Connie Giannoulis-Stuart and Con Giannoulis.



Con Giannoulis

The world has changed immeasurably in 50 years, but Caesar's Steak House remains the same as when it opened its doors in 1972. And Caesar's regulars wouldn't have it any other way.

"It's hard to find a place in Calgary, or across Canada, that has the décor, this feeling of luxury and elegance. It's difficult for businesses to just build this today," says Connie Giannoulis-Stuart, co-owner of Caesar's Steak House and second-generation restaurateur. "A lot of customers come to us and say, 'don't change a thing.'"

While the team is constantly refreshing the upholstery on the original high-quality chairs and banquette benches to maintain a beautiful and luxurious décor, the design as well as the menu remains true to Con Giannoulis' original vision for his restaurant.

It started when Con Giannoulis left Greece for Canada in 1958 at 17 years old with \$26, no English and a debt for his travel costs. He worked hard, learned all he could from everyone around him, and found work in a kitchen to support himself and to send money home.

"I did anything to survive," says Con Giannoulis, co-owner of Caesar's Steak House. "I went to tech school for a year, and it was a good start for me. Then it was practice and working with the other guys in the kitchen. I worked in the kitchen for 5 years and became Executive Chef."

He mastered his craft and learned all he could about the restaurant business. He had a dream of opening his own steak house, and he tackled every obstacle and challenge to make that dream a reality. By 1971, he and three other Greek immigrants and restaurant professionals were ready to strike out on their own, so they bought the 4 Avenue SW property in July, engaged an architect to design their restaurant, and on April 26, 1972 Caesar's Steak House opened its doors.

The restaurant did well, attracting diners who appreciated polished service, luxurious atmosphere, and quality food, all that had been curated to create an extravagant experience for their guests. When the economy tanked in the 1980s, Giannoulis resisted the pull to offer discounts to seduce business or to lower the quality in order to lower the prices. Competitors weren't as disciplined, and many of the restaurants that ran two-for-one deals and discounts went under while Caesar's stood. The partners even opened a second restaurant in Willow Park in 1985 to accommodate the large number of south Calgary customers who wanted a more convenient way to enjoy the Caesar's experience. Whether diners came to the downtown or Willow Park location, the quality food and unparalleled service was the same. At a time when so many businesses failed, the Caesar's Steak House expansion was successful and continues to augment the Caesar's brand.

The 1988 Olympics provided a welcome boost that would elevate the steak house to another level. Several television broadcasters had standing reservations at Caesar's before and during the Olympics in Calgary, and with every broadcast from or feature story about the restaurant, the word spread. Not only did Calgarians get acquainted with their hometown culinary jewel, but the restaurant found its way onto the radar of European, Asian and American tourists.

"It put us on the map," Giannoulis says. "During the Olympics we got such great exposure to the outside world. We were really busy, even at times when we expected to be slow."

After the Olympics, the slow summer period disappeared and visitors from every corner of the world came to experience all that Caesar's had to offer year-round, from spectacular food to a comprehensive cocktail menu including the made-in-Calgary Caesar in the lounge.

That experience goes beyond just a good meal. The philosophy from the start was to offer unparalleled quality starting with exceptional Alberta beef coupled with the best service and atmosphere in town; that has sustained Caesar's through several recessions and changes in the restaurant industry over the years. As Executive Chef, Giannoulis developed a great relationship with Centennial Foodservice and brought the premium meat distributor with him when he opened Caesar's. Since the beginning, Centennial has

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Con Giannoulis, Connie Giannoulis-Stuart and Gerry Stuart.

worked hard to ensure specifications are met to guarantee the restaurant maintains its top-shelf quality standards on every dish. These prime cuts make Caesar's signature menu items incredible, with people coming in especially for the amazing bone-in rib eye, chateaubriand, lunch time favorite the steak sandwich or the new Brant Lake Wagyu rib eye.

They also take great pride in their Wine Spectator award winning wine selection. "Gerry and I were the first couple

to graduate together in the International Sommelier Guild diploma program. We've put a lot of love and soul into the wine cellar. It's really a complement to what we do," says Giannoulis-Stuart.

The focus on relentless consistency is key, and Caesar's has garnered a great deal of success based on this principle. Constantly delivering a high-quality experience sets this iconic restaurant apart. Each member of the 75-person team does their part to make customers' experience special, from the front-of-house reception and long-time servers who are specially trained in tableside to the back-of-house kitchen staff who take pride in a perfectly prepared steak.

"We always had a traditional French-style service. We really brought back the lost art of tableside service in the mid 2000s, and it's part of the experience. It's a bit of theatre, with the different personalities of the servers interacting with the guests. It's a big part of what we do," says Connie Giannoulis-Stuart.

Caesar's respects its history, as well as its guests' personal and professional traditions and celebrations. The experience is why Caesar's has become a place where people come together to celebrate milestones in life, business, and relationships over a meal. No matter the occasion, the staff makes each visit

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memorable from the time patrons walk in until they leave satisfied. The Caesar's team is also proud to welcome diners who have been coming to the restaurant for decades and who introduce the next generations to the Caesar's experience. In fact, it's common to have three generations seated around a table, and this loyalty is something the team takes to heart.

"We are privileged to have long been the place where it's been families and generations. When people walk in they know what they are going to get. We've got a tradition to uphold. We are respectful of that legacy and feel privileged to be able to continue it," says Gerry Stuart, co-owner of Caesar's Steak House.

Con Giannoulis shares ownership responsibility with his daughter and son-in-law who invested in the business in 2005, and purchased the shares of the remaining partners in 2016. While this next generation honours the original feel of the restaurant, they are dedicated to continuing to provide its guests excellence in every sense of the word and surpassing expectations. They are committed to maintaining Caesar's legacy by staying authentic to its vision of the ritual of dining, a ritual that is something opulent but personal, savoured in a luxurious environment where the nostalgia evokes feelings of connection to one's memories and those around them.

Caesar's is a place where Calgarians celebrate, commemorate and reminisce over cocktails, wine, and exceptional Alberta beef, and they are honoured to serve generations to come, to build upon an incredible 50-year business legacy.



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