

THE TWO RIVER TIMES™

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Steve Bidgood:

Service with a Smile

Everybody knows Biddy.

Restaurateur Steve Bidgood, who is the managing partner of the Salt Creek Grille in Rumson and regional operating partner for the company, is known for great enthusiasm and genuine warmth about the important facets of his life – his family, his restaurants and the work he does that makes a difference in the lives of others.

As he spreads his work out each morning over several high-top tables in the Rumson restaurant bar, he can glance out at a stunning, long view of the Navesink River and the Oceanic Bridge while thumbing through a number of letters, sent from various organization, that ask for a gift card or some type of donation. On a recent morning, he held a half-dozen such requests in his hand. While he tries to keep the donations made within a 10-mile radius, he and the restaurant are known for their generosity.

He is committed to offering his assistance and the assistance of the restaurant “for a couple of different reasons.

“When I was young lad, about 10 years old, my mom was head of the volunteers at Marlboro State Psychiatric Hospital and so I would go there two, three nights a week with my brothers and we would volunteer. The facilities at that time were a lot different than they are now,” he said. “It was sad.

“My mom taught me at a young age that you should always want to help out and give back,” he said. “Throughout all my years in the restaurant business, I have given back to the community ... and since

Day One with Salt Creek, we’ve always given back. Each restaurant – there are five, Rumson and Princeton in New Jersey and three in California – picks a charity each year. We have a wine tasting, we call it our anniversary party ... Everything is donated ... and the charity sets the ticket price and they get 100 percent of that amount.”

This year, the Salt Creek Grille in Rumson has chosen the Hope For Children Foundation as its charity. The event will be held from 7 to 10 p.m. Thursday, April 10, and will feature a wine bar, food and entertainment from various area purveyors, including Sickles and Lusty Lobster, along with gift baskets, a live auction and a cash raffle. Tickets are priced at \$150.

“It makes you feel good,” said Bidgood, who has an affinity for children’s charities.

While acknowledging that giving to charities is good exposure for the restaurants, his attitude is “how can you not help?”

A native of Middletown – he met his wife Lynn when both were students at Middletown High School, she was 15, he was 17 – Bidgood, known as “Biddy” to his friends, found out early that working in restaurants enabled him to combine his passions for people and his need to help others.

He began in the business as a 14-year-old, washing dishes at the Molly Pitcher Inn. When he started, it was “just a job,” but then he began working room service on Sundays – “no one wanted to work Sundays because you had to be there at 5 a.m.” – and he worked as a

busboy. He really liked the work and would make great tips and earn a lot of money as a kid. It was at the time in the 1970s when entertainers appearing at the then-Garden State Arts Center, like Bob Hope and The Supremes, would stay at the Red Bank hotel. “It was great,” he said

Bidgood also was a paperboy for the Asbury Park Press.

“I was a busy guy,” he said. “I liked working and I saved so much money ... I enjoyed being with people.”

Early in his career, Bidgood got involved “working in the back-of-the-house” in a job at commissary for restaurants in Rockland County, N.Y. It was there he got some valuable lessons in food preparation from two fellow employees who were instructors from the Culinary Institute of America. “They gave me an education in breaking down meat, cutting meat, making sauces,” Bidgood said. He worked for six or seven years at the commissary, first during summers and then full-time after graduating from University of Missouri, where he majored in hospitality management. When he wanted to buy into the business, which had grown to six restaurants, the owners told him the timing wasn’t right.

Bidgood then quit the restaurant business. He and his younger brother moved to Colorado where their older brother was living.

“I got out of the restaurant business for about seven months. I worked for my brother in construction and waking up at 5 in the morning, getting out and looking at the elk, lugging tar shields for roofs ... I finally said to myself, ‘I’m not having any fun’ and I had fun working in restaurants.”

He got back into the business at the Morrison Inn in Morrison, Colo., and became a bartender at a restaurant opened by that company.

“I was out in front with the people. I wasn’t back-of-the-house anymore,” he said. “I was having a great time. I’m not a shy individual. I love talking to people. I like working the floor.”

He then became a manager but eventually joined the company that owns Chart Houses. It was his first time working in a corporate atmosphere. He started in its management program in Coronado, Calif., which has managers-to-be learn in the classroom and by working every position from dishwasher up.

He worked for the company for 16 years in such locales as Nashua, N.H., Baltimore, Hilton Head Island, St. Thomas, V.I., and Boston – where he became a big Red Sox fan. He then “took on the challenge” of running the company’s restaurant in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. He was there for five years but during that time, the company was bought and he was not happy. He put feelers out and came into the Salt Creek Grille company as a manager/partner when the Rumson restaurant, the company’s second of five, opened April 15, 1998.

“We opened with a bang,” he said.

For the first year, he worked every day and supported every charity he could. “We care about the community and want to be part of it,” he said.

He speaks with pride about the people he has employed, including one who is a doctor and another who is an attorney. He also is proud that his customers’ kids want to work at the Bingham Avenue eatery when they grow up.

The restaurant, like everything else around, was hit hard by Super Storm Sandy, but Bidgood’s previous experience with a hurricane in the Virgin Islands had taught him to line up his contractors before the storm. He was able to open within two weeks and Salt Creek became a gathering place for shell-shocked residents “seeking normalcy.” It was similar to what had happened after Sept. 11, 2001.

Bidgood calls the restaurant a “comfortable, welcoming place. I have such a great staff who have energy and smiles and enjoy the business. That’s why we have been successful.”

The restaurant has employees who have worked there since it opened.

Nowadays, Bidgood doesn’t have to be there every day, though he still puts in 60-hour weeks. He enjoys such pleasures as spring and fall walks on a boardwalk with his wife, his two weeks vacation on the beach at the Driftwood Cabana Club where he is a member and what can only be described as the celebration of his “birthday month” in August. It gives him the time needed to participate on the boards on which he sits – The Community YMCA, Count Basie Theatre and the Two River Community Bank. He also has been the emcee for the American Red Cross gala for the past five years.

Bidgood and his wife are the parents of “two great daughters,” who, like their dad, are committed to doing work for charities. Megan, 24, works for a broadcast company in Maryland, and Shauna, 21, a student at Towson University, is head of charities for her sorority.

For Bidgood, it’s all about “making it right” at his restaurant and in life.

“I want to get it right,” he said. “I want people to enjoy themselves. When was the last time you went out saying, ‘Let’s go out and have a bad time?’”

As for retirement, Biddy isn’t even considering it. “I’ll retire when I’m not having fun any more,” he said

From the looks of it, that’s a long way off.

By Michele J. Kuhn



DANNY SANCHEZ