



Photos by Christine M.J. Hathaway



Mike's on the Water

By John Minnis

By October 2010, Mike LeFevre had already been a successful restaurateur, enjoying semi-retirement in Florida, the East Coast and traveling the world. Along the way, he checked out the local establishments, unconsciously planning his new place. “For 7 ½ years, I didn’t work,” he notes. “When I traveled, I just didn’t go to eat, I wondered how they did that.”

Except for his sister, LeFevre may still be wandering the world. In 2009, Susan Amine was diagnosed with cancer. The older brother came back to Grosse Pointe to be near his little sister and help out, shuttling her to and from doctors’ offices and chemo treatments. Every evening, from 8 to 10, they played Scrabble, her brother having been Scrabble champion in the seventh grade at Our Lady Star of the Sea. They kept score on the inside cardboard cover of the Scrabble game, the first score recorded on Sept. 23, 2010, the last on Nov. 28, 2012, two weeks before her death. Her service was one of the largest ever held at Our Lady Star of the Sea.

On Oct. 5, 2010, LeFevre and his sister were playing Scrabble when a friend of hers visited. The friend’s husband asked LeFevre what he was doing, work-wise. He said, “Nothing.” He then told LeFevre that Pete Beauregard, owner of Michigan Harbor on the Nautical Mile, was looking for someone to open a restaurant in an old bathhouse and warehouse at the docks. He recommended Mike LeFevre.

“That’s how it all started,” says LeFevre, who opened Mike’s on the Water the following spring in May 2011. “There’s a lot of emotional history behind it and how this came about because of her cancer.”

The next day, LeFevre and his sister drove to Michigan Harbor and got their first view of the old clapboard bathhouse. It was love at first

sight. “It said ‘burger bar,’” LeFevre recalls. It reminded him of the East Coast and Key West, a theme he has cultivated inside and out.

Beauregard wanted him to take the warehouse as well, but LeFevre, a veteran restaurateur of 35 years who began working as a kid for his grandfather at the Lido, wisely declined. He employed his own KISS method, keeping it small and promising good food and service.

Mike’s on the Water began with a bar, some booths and additional tables in a three-season patio. Later, an outside deck bar was built, offering grilled food outside so as to not overload Mike’s small kitchen. Last year, bowing to popular demand, Mike’s full menu was offered outside as well. When Mike’s opens this year, March 20, the first day of spring, regulars will be greeted with some new menu items, including barbecued ribs and escargot, and an expanded outdoor eating area with 60 more seats, eight to 10 more bar stools and a covered bandstand.

“Every year you need to make changes. I listen to my customers,” says LeFevre, who greets patrons seven days and nights a week during the season and is not above bussing tables and serving meals. Mike’s is closed four months during the winter — time its hands-on owner needs to “recharge his batteries” and to plan new stuff, like more outdoor seating, four to six new boat wells for bigger vessels and, in future years, a second-story outdoor deck for private parties and an on-site charter boat.

“It’s been a successful run,” LeFevre says. “I love what I do. I’m proud of what I’ve created. It was my sister’s cancer that brought me back, and it fell into my lap.”

Mike’s on the Water may be found online at www.mikesonthewater.com and on Facebook.