

# Luigi's, an Oelwein tradition

By JACK SWANSON

Managing Editor

OELWEIN - Forty-four years and growing strong, Luigi's Restaurant and Lounge will be celebrating their continued growth all during the month of August.

Luigi Stasi has been operating Luigi's on the corner of S. Frederick and 11th Street since 1959. From hamburgers to carhops, disco to political gatherings, the restaurant and lounge has been through it all.

Currently Luigi is getting help from his son, Marty, who is now the manager.

Forty four years ago, Luigi, and his wife, Colleen (O'Brien) and two children, returned to Oelwein (Luigi's hometown) from Rochester, Minn., where he had been working in the automotive department at a Montgomery Wards store. With the idea to start a small cafe and drive-in, Luigi spotted a piece of commercial property that had come up for sale and the rest was history.

He started out with a 24 by 40 foot cafe with a drive-up window. In three years a 15 by 15 foot extension was added into the south corner.

In 1964, more seating was added with a 24 by 40-foot addition. Broasted chicken was added to the menu and Italian dishes were gradually incorporated, established Luigi's as one of the most well-known Italian restaurants in Northeast Iowa.

The business saw its latest renovation in 1973-74 when the kitchen was moved to its present location and a banquet addition was constructed to the north, with seating for 350 guests.

"I started out with the idea that I wanted to work for myself...be independent with no boss. I definitely didn't think I would be here this long, at the time. I just kept adding on and one thing lead to another," Luigi explained.

Marty got his start early in life at the restaurant, picking up dishes from tables on Sundays, when he was 11-years-old. Asked if he thought about taking over the business one day in those early times he said, "I wasn't thinking that far ahead. I was just here everynight," he commented.



## 44 and counting

The father-son team of Marty (left) and Luigi Stasi are celebrating the 44th anniversary of their restaurant and lounge business during the entire month of August. (Photo by Jack Swanson)

He went on to say that some of the things that brought him back home were the same things that had originally attracted his father to starting his own business. "I pursued other things but ultimately I wanted to work for myself. This is a family business and I feel there is a tradition to carry on. My grandfather on my mother's side was also an Oelwein businessman. He owned his own shoe store, so we have a long history in business with the town."

Marty actually has an engineering degree from the University of Iowa and worked for the Donaldson Company in Cresco for seven years. His wife, Tammy, is a fourth grade teacher at Wings Park Elementary.

Luigi credits much of his success to his traditional Italian upbringing and emphasis on family. He said without the support of his wife, six children, brothers and sisters, he would not have prospered.

"You just have to roll with the punches. If you can weather the storm and take the lows with the highs, and the other pressures of business, you'll make it. It's stick-toedness," he explained.

Marty also points out the other



## The early days

This is how Luigi's looked in the early days of business.

aspects that have made the business thrive.

"Part of it is that food quality is number one. You also have to know your clientele," he commented.

"Northeast Iowa has been good to us and Oelwein has been a good business town, and basically still is a good town," Luigi

explained.

"The more you see of other places, the more you start to see the advantages of Oelwein," Marty said.

The restaurant is now focused on banquets, receptions and business meetings, as well as maintaining a full menu dining room.