



Nat's On Maple: **Thriving in a Competitive Restaurant Industry, A DeKalb County Small Business Success Story**

Nat's on Maple is a new, but familiar, player in a densely packed and competitive Sycamore restaurant environment. It is a thriving and successful restaurant, known for mixing classic Midwestern American fare with innovative touches. It is also known for its comfortable ambience, which strikes a balance between trendy urbanism and a relaxed family environment. It is also worth noting Nat's is a popular destination for important meetings of local officials and business people. A few weeks back, I had a chance to enjoy some coffee with Natalie Waeghe, part owner and founder of Nat's On Maple (which, intuitively, is named after her) and ask a few questions about her now prosperous independent business. The story of Nat's is one that is likely to encourage the aspiring young entrepreneur in these uncertain economic times.

The first ingredient of any successful business is the expertise of its founding member(s). As is the case with many DeKalb County entrepreneurs (Northern Illinois University) Natalie was college educated, receiving a baccalaureate degree in Hospitality Management from Georgia State University, gaining ground level expertise in serving tables all the while. She then moved to Addison as part of the effort to open the food/entertainment centre Dave and Buster's, where she met her husband Dave Waeghe (who occupied the position of executive chef). Between them, they had enough depth of knowledge to fully manage a restaurant, both from the food and customer service sides of the ball.

The Waeghes found a property in Sycamore that had previously been a small restaurant and wine retailer. It had long been their dream to own and operate a small family business that could be a congregating area for a loyal, hometown customer base. Sycamore seemed to be an ideal location. They used their own hard-earned savings to acquire the space on Maple, while renting the restaurant capital and machinery inside from the previous owner. Nat's On Maple finally opened its doors on October 18, 2004.

However, financing this endeavor was no easy task. They had to approach seven separate financial entities to receive even an equipment loan! A total renovation and redecoration of the property's interior was also necessary and costly. For the first year and a half of Nat's On Maple's existence the Waeghe's reinvested their profits into the costs and operations of the new restaurant. All the while, Natalie needed to keep her corporate restaurant management job in order to keep the business prosperous.

The vision of Nat's on Maple was to serve the community first, acquiring regular customers who prefer personalized service in the company of friends and family. The philosophy has paid off, and the backbone of Nat's on Maple's business is the local DeKalb County patron. Nat's successful and customer-specific catering business has also come into it's own.

As it applies to other aspiring business owners, Nat's on Maple is a prime example of patience and diligence (along with expertise and creative vision) creating great prosperity within DeKalb County. This is a positive message for aspiring entrepreneurs of the County, as with proper planning, courage, and knowledge a thriving business of your own could be a reality...even in these difficult financial times.

-Julian Magdaleno

DeKalb County Board Office