



Hooray for the Little Guys

Posted by: [admin](#) on Nov 6, 2009

The night before last, I started a new tradition in my house: visit a new Queens restaurant every Wednesday night. I started with a trip to Sanford's in Astoria, on Broadway at 31st St., right underneath the subway stop. We had a good meal - my companion had the pork osso buco which literally melted in my mouth; I had the roasted chicken, which was moist and flavorful. We said hello to Gus Karalekas, one of the Astoria-born-and-raised owners, who with his brother Chris, has transformed Sanford's from their Dad's 24-hour coffee shop into a bona-fide restaurant (also open 24/7!) with a great wine and beer list. Sanford's has been around for 75 years, and in the Karalekas family for 34.

I mention all this because Gus and his brother Chris seem to have done a great job training their staff to pay attention to customers and make sure they're happy. Hey, it's not Per Se service; they use paper napkins. But we were brought clean napkins for every course, our water glasses were filled, we didn't have to wait for our entrees even though we didn't finish our appetizer and our waitress and busboy smiled and looked us in the eye when we spoke. We didn't have to wait for the check. The prices were reasonable, and a good value.

Running a small business is one of the hardest things a person will ever attempt. Achieving success - however modestly one defines it - is an incredible accomplishment. Running a successful restaurant in New York City? Really. Really. Not. Easy. Those who do it (mostly) well deserve our praise and support. They might be tough on their waiters, giving them a lot of nit-picky rules to follow. They might even try to organize their vision into long, annoying, crazy-person lists. But restaurateurs and other small business owners who care about quality and demand it in every aspect of their business are, really, a rare breed. They're passionate and particular, and that's what makes their restaurants (or wine shops, or markets) good places to visit.