



DOING WHAT THEY DO BEST

THE SANDPIPER RESTAURANT

The Sandpiper is open Monday–Friday from 4–10 PM

Their Secret Ingredient: Ron Obendorf

The area's most frequent recipient of the Idaho Falls Magazine's Best American Fine Dining award is The Sandpiper Restaurant on Lindsay Boulevard. Its beginning in the early 1970s was as part of a chain of upscale restaurants in several western states. But while all the others have seen their demise, the Idaho locations remain and flourish.

The obvious question is why here? The answer is Ron Obendorf, owner and operator. Mustached Ron is the quintessential host, charming and genuinely happy, spending time with his staff and patrons.

Ron's early years were devoted not only to learning all the details of food preparation and service, but also a wide variety of other experiences—hot shot ski instructing, school teaching, restaurant consulting and potato selling—all of which color and broaden his liberal education and make him such an enjoyable conversationalist.

Recognizing Ron's gifts as a restaurateur, chain management found him useful in a variety of locations stretching from Boise to Sun City, Arizona. His natural gifts and attention to detail found him responsible for and capable of such varied tasks as painting, staining, and landscaping the Idaho Falls site.

Eventually, Ron was offered the ownership of the three Idaho locations—Idaho Falls, Pocatello and Twin Falls. He proved his business acumen by selling off the unprofitable Twin Falls operation, and then incorporating and selling shares in the business to financially able customers, friends and business associates. Thus Ron found himself following his own business dictum: Do what you do best.

A Motto to Live By

Doing his best found Ron the first in Idaho Falls to go smokeless—defying all who promised sure failure. In addition, rather than providing a typical choice of lounge or dining area, he determined that even the room that features the bar would have complete food service—including the bar—along with the characteristic wide-screen televisions for those who like to keep up with the game while dining, a little more casual atmosphere.

The greatest draw on summer days comes from the large deck, with both covered and open areas, featuring a large fireplace for those occasional nippy evenings, and allowing patrons to view the beautiful river, waterfowl and greenbelt denizens.

Both large and small banquet rooms are available, and one of the two kitchens is dedicated to providing the best possible service to large groups. The bar is a full service bar and a great wine list is available.

Even though tastes change over the years, there are some menu items that remain favorites and keep loyal customers returning often. Prime rib tops the list, but seafood, flown in daily from the Honolulu Fish Company, remains a powerful attraction, including sushi-grade salmon. Ron's own favorite is the Hawaiian Crunch Halibut, a recipe he obtained from his friend Dave Musgrave, who, before his death, was owner and operator of the Hawg Smoke Café in Idaho Falls.

One patron recorded his review this way:

“Best prime rib in town. If you're lucky, a funny guy with a mustache will join you for a scotch at your table. I love The Sandpiper. It's the closest thing to Cheers in Idaho Falls. Everybody knows your name. When our family goes out to eat, this is their favorite.”

That “funny guy with the mustache” will most often be found seated on a stool at the end of the bar counter next to the hostess' station to be able to greet and chat with the steady stream of happy customers.

The Successful Small Business

Even though restaurant businesses have high failure rates, Ron has demonstrated that when everyone involved cares about the work, the business will always do well. The Sandpiper's employee turnover rate is minuscule, the wait staff is loyal and committed, and the kitchen manager, Rex Richards, has been at his post for 34 years. This consistency has allowed Ron to maintain the high quality so important to him, and inviting to his patrons.

The demands of any small business are heavy, and the dining world is no exception. According to national statistics, about a third of all restaurant closures occur even while still making a profit, underscoring the heavy demands of the time and effort that some owners just can't maintain. When asked about this statistic, Ron rejected it outright. His response “You'd never close if it is profitable,” demonstrates his dedicated mindset and reveals his love of his work.

While the common denominators of successful businesses are location, location and location, there is an added issue with

dining establishments. There we must add quality of product and skill of operation. Those two additions can overcome an unfortunate location, but even a restaurant situated in the best location—such as the banks of a beautiful river for example—could not survive without the high-quality product and superior skill of operation Ron brings to his establishment.

As fulfilled as Ron is with the success of his business, there is an additional quality that speaks well of his commitment to his community. In addition to the upscale business, its attractiveness and financial contribution to our city, there is a kind and humble side to this good man as evidenced by his continual employment of some who are physically or mentally challenged and who find it difficult to find gainful employment. Even though this commitment demands patience and attention above the average, Ron's commitment is sure.

The Sandpiper Restaurant is a valuable asset to our community. Thanks, Ron.

The Sandpiper Restaurant provides excellent cuisine with entrees such as steak and ribs, and fish flown in by the Honolulu Fish Company.



Reviews of The Sandpiper Restaurant

from tripadvisor.com

This was our first visit to The Sandpiper but it will definitely not be our last. The prices were affordable, the ambiance welcoming, the views impressive and the food preparation fabulous. I was particularly impressed with the seafood dish I ordered, a nut crusted halibut. The overall experience far exceeded our expectations.

– Anonymous

My husband and I were visiting Idaho Falls for the first time and had just checked in to our hotel after a long, hot day of driving. We took a walk along the river to go see the falls and noticed a restaurant with a huge deck out back that overlooked the river. It was packed with people, and delicious smells were wafting our way. We decided we had to eat there!

We put our name on the waiting list and were pleasantly surprised to be seated right on the deck near the railing in less than 10 minutes. We loved sitting outside enjoying the view of the river and the people walking along the path.

Our meal was absolutely delicious! I had seafood and my husband had steak, and we both loved our meals. In fact, I told my husband that I felt like a queen sitting out on the deck, sipping wine, enjoying a delicious meal, and listening to live music. (Yes—the restaurant had a singer/guitarist). What an unexpected find this restaurant turned out to be.

– Anonymous