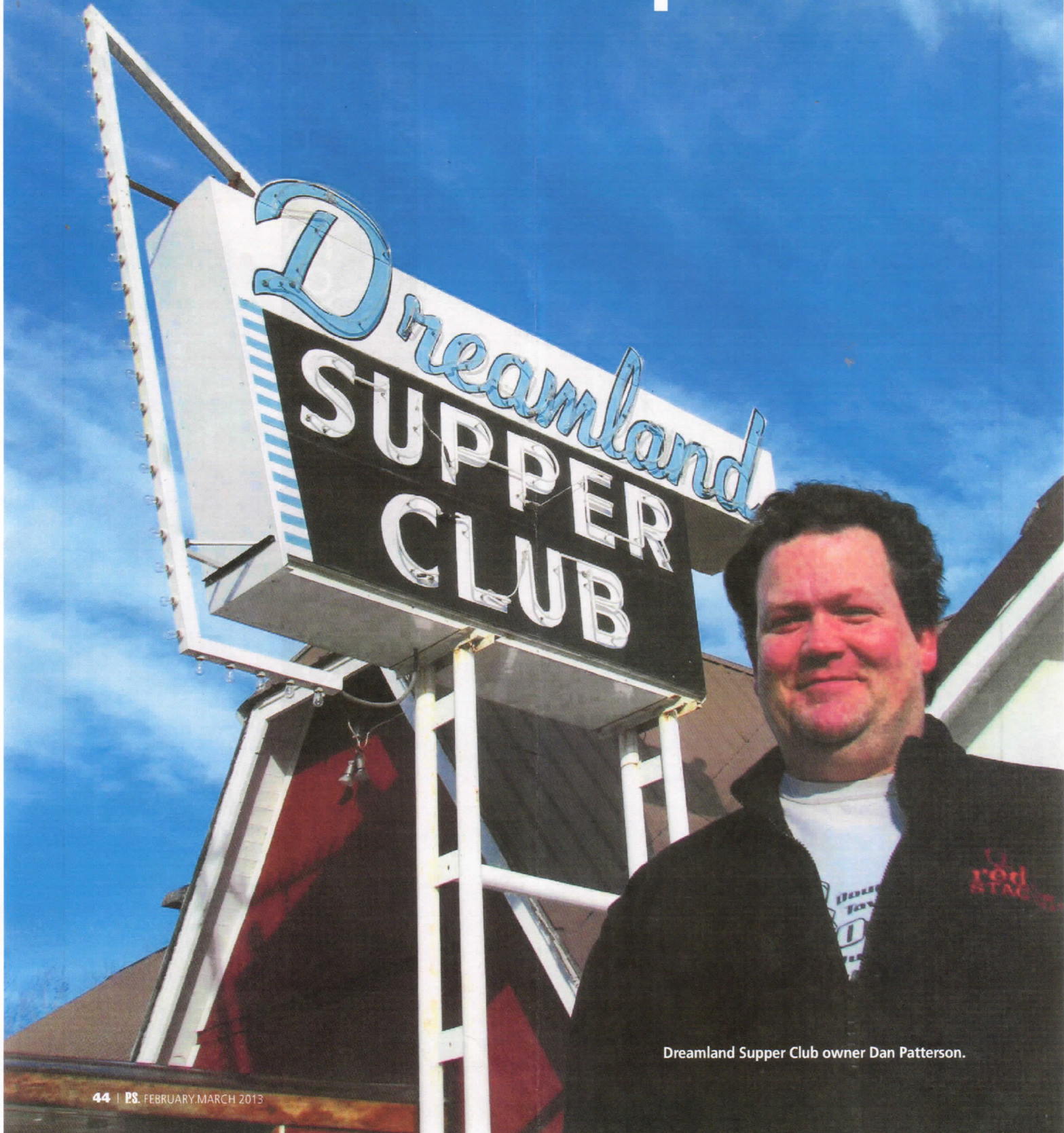


Classic Superior



Dreamland Supper Club owner Dan Patterson.

Restaurants

Whether It's the Vibe, the Service or the History (And, of Course, the Food), Longtime Local Eateries Have Found the Recipe for Success



By Tony Bennett

Survival of the fittest. That's what we're really talking about here. While the restaurant business may not seem to share much in common with the concepts and theories of evolutionary biology, the fact is that local eateries in business the longest are also the fittest – in the sense that they provide people with a uniquely enjoyable dining experience. Decades can go by, but the demand for that experience is still there.

What is it, though, that makes some restaurants last for 10, 20, 30, 40 or more years? Why do some places close after a year or two, while another one down the block keeps on plugging away as fashions and hairstyles and everything around it seems to change as often as the seasons? There must be something there – some recipe, some bit of décor, some uncommon attitude or vibe that can turn a place from a run-of-the-mill restaurant into something else: something resembling tradition.

The answer isn't easy to pin down and it differs from establishment to establishment. To delve into the question, we spoke with representatives from four Superior-area restaurants that could very well be described as beloved – names that set locals' mouths to watering with just a mention: Eddie's World

“There were certain things people wanted, like the relish tray, a traditional supper club thing most places have gotten rid of. It's something that means something to people. It's the old-fashioned Wisconsin experience.”

– DAN PATTERSON, DREAMLAND SUPPER CLUB



Famous Ribs, Dreamland Supper Club, The Shack and The Kitchen. These are places with a couple hundred years of history between them, places that mean good meals and good memories to so many folks. But what's their secret?

One of the most veteran restaurants in the Superior area is the Dreamland Supper Club in South Range. It's so old the guy who runs it can't even really tell you how long it's been around.

“It's been around since at least the '20s,” said owner Dan Patterson. “I cannot figure out exactly when it was built, but I know that the Morrison family built it. Our best guess is about 1925, but the Morrison family bought the property in the 1880s, so there's about 40 years unexplained there. But I know it was the Dreamland in the mid-'20s.” After that, Patterson noted, the place changed hands a few times, usually being passed down from parents to children. Owners kept the supper club going for several decades apiece, usually. Patterson and his spouse bought it from one of those children about 13 years ago.

“I went to school for business,” Patterson said. “I worked in restaurants and hotels for about a dozen years.” But even with that resume and experience, taking on the responsibility of running a supper club wasn't something he had been

planning to do. "I had given up on the idea," he said. "It wasn't a good prospect. Everything that I looked into said, 'Don't do it, don't do it.' But we bought a house a mile away from Dreamland, and it was for sale."

So although Patterson had thought his restaurant-owning goals were behind him, the proximity of the place to his new home got him and his wife talking. And talking led to some tentative steps into assessing what it would take to acquire the supper club. "It started looking like maybe it would work – and it did," he said, laughing. The history of the place was no small selling point. "That was a helpful part, because it had a name, so you weren't starting from scratch," explained Patterson. "Part of it was affordability and things just worked out."

For Patterson, the first order of business was "maintaining the food," he said. "The certain items that people were accustomed to – recipes, the homemade things." Secondly, his considerations were cosmetic. "The important thing was to fix it up. It was pretty run down," he said. "We chipped away a little bit at a time as we got more secure. We never shut down for renovations; we did what we could when we were closed. But we did foundation work, redid floors, put a second well in. We did quite a bit."

But the Dreamland's food – the stuff that Superiorites loved so dearly – had to live up to its name. "There were certain things people wanted," Patterson noted, "like the relish tray, a traditional supper club thing most places have gotten rid of. It's something that means something to people. It's the old-fashioned Wisconsin experience."



Patterson says that his restaurant has been able to stay competitive in the years following the 2008 economic collapse. "Most people that come out here say it's unbelievable – what they get for the price. It's very affordable, with large portions," he said. "We're known for lobster, French-fried turkey, seafood platters."

Dreamland Supper Club, to locals in the Superior area, is well known for that lobster. "I actually think it's kind of funny when people travel to the [East] coast and they make comments about

how they think our lobster is better," Patterson said. "We do Australian or New Zealand lobster and we prepare them correctly."

As with all the classic Superior restaurants, a huge component of Dreamland's advertising is of the word-of-mouth variety. "We're on TV on and off," Patterson said. "We've been on [KBJR] for over a year now. We've been on radio, some print, some social media. We have a website. We just started that."

Dreamland employs about a half-dozen consistent staff. "A cook, three waitresses, and a couple people in the kitchen," Patterson said. This core group is augmented by part-time employees, some of whom are even the children of former Dreamland owners.

Another big name in the world of well-known Superior eateries is Eddie's World Famous Ribs. Dina Connor acquired the business in 1996 with her ex-husband. And she's been running it ever since.

"My parents had owned bars and restaurants," Connor said. "I had worked in the restaurant business from when I was 14, at Barker's Island and The Shack." For her, the idea of owning a restaurant had been a logical next step. "Eddie's was the right size and it was a homey, family restaurant," she said. "That attracted us. We live upstairs, and it's like inviting people over every night."

"We still get people, now, after 17 years, who come in and remember coming here on their first date, things like that."

— DINA CONNOR, EDDIE'S WORLD FAMOUS RIBS

