



Martini & Nuzzi's Lounge visitors enjoy an afternoon at the new restaurant and bar, located in the Kazmaier plaza, on the corner of Perrysburg-Holland and Manley Roads.



Cheryl Jiannuzzi (left) and Marlene Cash, close friends and owners of Martini & Nuzzi's Lounge, stand outside their new restaurant/bar.

MIRROR PHOTOS BY KRISTI LEIGH

Martini And Nuzzi's Lounge Is A Dream Come True For Two Area Women

BY KRISTI LEIGH
MIRROR REPORTER

It took a life-threatening experience to push Cheryl Jiannuzzi into completing her dream of opening her own place with a longtime friend.

Her dream came true on June 29 when Jiannuzzi and her friend, Marlene Cash, opened the doors to Martini and Nuzzi's Lounge, located at 6023 Manley Road in Maumee, next to Kazmaier's Market.

The lounge is named after a play on their names. Martini came from the "Mar" in Marlene's name and Nuzzi from Jiannuzzi's granddaughter calling her "Grandma Nuzzi."

"I got tired of working for everyone else. I've been doing it all my life," Jiannuzzi said. "I should have (opened the lounge) a long time ago."

She started out working at the shop her parents owned, Dutch-Made Candies, on Broadway.

"I worked for them. I've worked for everybody, but always in the restaurant business, and it's the same with Marlene, she's always been in it," Jiannuzzi said.

"We've known each other now for about 25 years," Cash said. "I was working for Biddy Mulligan's — the original Biddy Mulligan's — and Cheryl was running a bartending school a couple doors down."

"After (the students) would graduate, they would come down and I would let them

come behind the bar and make drinks there, so they could see what they taste like. That's how Cheryl and I met.

"And then we worked together at Centre Court Lounge," Jiannuzzi continued. "She was there nine years and I was there 16 years. I managed it and she bartended at night."

Cash said they always worked well together because she likes working nights and Jiannuzzi likes working days. Consequently, they had always thought about opening a place of their own.

In October of last year, a life-altering event spurred the two women to pursue their dream. After Jiannuzzi's appendix ruptured and she was rushed to the hospital, her doctor told her, "You're very lucky to be alive. Whatever you planned on doing in your life, do it."

"I had gangrene and everything," she said, laughing. "He said, 'You're a very lucky little girl; do what you were going to do.'"

Soon after, while actively looking for a place, Jiannuzzi spotted a "For Lease" sign in a window, and asked Cash to check the space out with her.

Despite the fact that the previous tenant had been a maternity center, they decided to take on the vast amount of work it would take to convert the space into a restaurant/bar.

So far they've had to do just about everything to the place. They had to have the bar, the kitchen and the restrooms

installed, and they painted and supplied all the décor.

Jiannuzzi said they based the décor on New York and Chicago bars. Her two sons, along with a designer from Ethan Allen, designed it.

The bar stretches along the right side of the interior, covered in a laminate top that mimics cut steel.

Bright steel stools with black cushions are pushed in along the bar. Red and tan tapestries cover the walls, and brushed metal, wall-mounted lights are hung along the left side, where tables are set up.

The bar offers an Internet jukebox, Silver Strike Bowling and two Megatouch touch-screen game systems.

It also has one big-screen television and three smaller ones. Jiannuzzi said they may consider other additions in the future.

Jiannuzzi said she wants the place to be "cozy, comfortable, friendly and fun," and she is confident that they have achieved that atmosphere.

"We've had nothing but great comments," Jiannuzzi said. "Even the health inspector said, 'Oh my God, Cheryl, this place is extraordinary.'"

"We offer good food and have good people working here. We're also going to have NFL Football Ticket (a satellite

TV service), so we can get all the football games, which is really important."

Martini and Nuzzi's Lounge offers a full lunch and dinner menu.

"We have burgers, steaks, shrimp, stuffed mushrooms, soups and salads," Jiannuzzi said.

Cash and Jiannuzzi said they are pleased with their business since the bar's opening and attribute its success to the amount of experience they both have in the restaurant business.

"Years ago I ran the St. James Club on Bancroft for Brandywine," Cash said. "I handled all the cooking there. We did banquets and ran a restaurant and a bar downstairs. They leased out the upstairs for banquets and weddings, and I took care of all that."

Cash's 25 years of bartending experience also adds to the two women's expectations of success in the new business.

Jiannuzzi has extensive restaurant experience and has done many benefits for charities. She said her background in these areas has helped her in owning her new business.

"Our charity here is going to go to cancer research," she said. "We're going to do golf outings, benefits for people,

and we're going to make Easter baskets for the homeless, for the kids. We usually get Christmas presents for them and stuff like that. If anyone needs my help, I'm there."

Beyond the experience of the owners, Jiannuzzi said the bar has knowledgeable cooks and bartenders, and her whole staff knows how to have a good time.

Cash thinks another reason Martini and Nuzzi's Lounge already has regulars is their philosophy about customers.

"We get along well with people," Cash said. "We treat people the way we like to be treated, and we treat people like people, not customers."

A grand opening has not yet taken place, but will be coming soon. Plans are to have specials, hors d'oeuvres and an artist to do caricatures of the staff and regular customers.

In the future, Cash and Jiannuzzi would like to offer karaoke or bring in some other entertainment.

"Once in a while we would like to get a blues guy in here or a jazz guy," Jiannuzzi said. "We'll probably have another guy that comes in and sings, who just sings everything, classical or rock."

Other plans for the future may include franchising the business. Jiannuzzi said she

would like to franchise the business to her family, Cash's family or possibly even to investors. She would like to open other locations in the area or beyond down the road.

Cash made it clear that the business will not put a stress on her friendship with Jiannuzzi.

"We're both Scorpios, so we kind of know how the other one acts," Cash said. "I think we're both working for the same thing, so that makes a difference. We're both trying to make a go of it one way or another, and we listen to the other one's ideas. So, I can't imagine that we would have any major problems."

Jiannuzzi is confident people will keep coming back to Martini and Nuzzi's Lounge.

"People have been coming around (us) for 16 years, so I guess they're not tired of us yet," Jiannuzzi said, laughing.

"We're glad we did what we did; we're glad that we started this business," Jiannuzzi said. "Everything is going very well. Our customers — they're wonderful, and we love all our friends that stop by."

"It is like *Cheers* here. They all got their seats picked out. We got a Norm and everybody in here already."

Martini and Nuzzi's is open seven days a week from 9:00 a.m. until 2:30 a.m.

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