

Faces: Q&A with Fred Yarusso, owner (with brother Mike) of Yarusso-Bros. Italian Restaurant in St. Paul

Kathie Jenkins, Pioneer Press
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Fred Yarusso has been in the restaurant business for most of his life.
(Pioneer Press: John Doman))

Occupation: Owner (with brother Michael) of Yarusso-Bros. Italian Restaurant
(635 Payne Ave., St. Paul; 651-776-4848; yarussos.com)

Age: 59

What did you want to be when you grew up? I wanted to be an entertainer, maybe a musician. I played the drums in high school. I still have a set of drums and play occasionally. But just puttin' around, nothing serious.

What was your first job in food? I was a dishwasher at our restaurant.

How did you wind up in the restaurant business? My grandfather started the business, and Yarusso's has been in the family ever since.

What's the dish you are most proud of? My sauce and meatballs. It has been the same since I can remember.

What's something few people know about Yarusso's? That the bar side of the restaurant used to be a butcher shop and they shod horses on the other side of the building. The new addition was our front yard when we were children.

Any "off the menu" dishes we should know about? Pickled eggplant, what we call melanzane. Some of the old-timers still ask for it. Once in a while, people will bring in their family's melanzane so we can try different kinds. Not too many people make it anymore.

What's your favorite restaurant? I like the Chief Lake Lodge in Hayward, Wis. It's a nice place, and I like the broiled walleye.

If someone were to play you in a movie, who should it be? John Belushi. I like him. I used to do a half-assed imitation of the Blues Brothers.

What's the weirdest food you've ever eaten? I'm pretty fussy. I don't eat anything too weird.

What's next? I don't know. I'm still hangin' in here.