

Shia Kapos

TAKES NAMES



7/1/2011

[Gene & Georgetti marks 70 years of characters with a nod to retro drinks](#)

Gene & Georgetti is planning a retro cocktail party to celebrate its 70th year in business. The irony is it's retro every day.

Wedged between high-rises and the El tracks at Franklin and Illinois streets, Chicago's oldest steakhouse looks and feels pretty much the way it did in the beginning, with its mahogany bar, button-up waiters and the smell of garlic enveloping the room.

It's survived recessions, price increases and robust steakhouse competition by sticking to what it knows best—steaks and tradition.

"So far, it's worked," says owner **Tony Durpetti**, a radio-advertising executive who bought the place from his father-in-law in 1990.

When an opportunity came up recently to franchise the place, Mr. Durpetti and his wife, **Marion**, turned it



down. "We didn't want to do it just to make more money," he said while giving me a tour of the restaurant. Franchising would have meant losing the treasured tag line of being the oldest family-run restaurant, too. "We'd be like everyone else," he said, referring to Gibsons, Morton's and other restaurants that have franchised.

That's not to say Gene & Georgetti doesn't have a few gimmicks. It's mastered the art of showing off celebrities who visit. Back in the day, Frank Sinatra was a regular when he was in town. Now, you're just as likely to see a new crop famous faces—**Vince Vaughn** and **Russell Crowe** among them. (Mr. Durpetti has hung out with both actors at the bar.)

The restaurant is still a haunt for Chicago politicians (Gov. **Pat Quinn** is a regular) and business executives (the 2007 CME/CBOT merger deal was sealed in one of the restaurant's more private rooms).

It's also been a haunt to some of Chicago's most notorious names, too: The late Dan Rostenkowski dined there often before he was sent to prison for mail fraud. Imprisoned insurance mogul **Mickey Segal** was a regular as was former Gov. **Rod Blagojevich**, who is awaiting his own prison sentence.

As he prepared the bar for arrival of the Mahogany Club—a group of businessmen who order drinks every morning before the lunchtime crowd—Mr. Durpetti smiled, saying, "We get a lot of characters."

Gene & Georgetti plans some 1940s-themed parties to commemorate the anniversary, including prix-fix dinners and a retro-cocktail party July 14.