

Chapter One

# The Owners





*Sam Uglesich*

# Sam Uglesich

## The Founder

Sam Maté Uglesich founded Uglesich's Restaurant in 1924. Sam was born in the village of Bozava in Dugi Otak, Yugoslavia, a very poor country with many of its people starving. Hoping to start a better life, he unsuccessfully tried to come to America in 1918. But at the age of twenty he was successful in his second attempt, arriving by boat in 1920. He left behind his three brothers and three sisters to start a new life, and ultimately a better life for his future family.

Upon his arrival in the United States, he did not speak English, but found work in the restaurant business, which was owned by Yugoslavians. For the next four years, Sam learned and spoke the English language with a heavy accent. He saved enough money to open his own seafood and po-boy restaurant on South Rampart Street. In 1927, he obtained a lease agreement and moved the restaurant to its current location between Baronne and Erato streets.

It was at the restaurant that he met one of his neighbors, Emily Grandeury Perry, and her two children, Ruth and Gloria. Due to his accent, he called her "Emme," and the couple dated for about one year and were married in 1937. Emily and Sam had two children, the first a boy named Anthony, and the second a girl named Carol.

Sam was good hearted, and it was not uncommon for him to treat some customers to their food, if they were starving or short on cash. He would send packages of clothing, as well as money, to his family in Yugoslavia. From 1927 until the 1950s, the restaurant was open from 9 A.M. to 2 A.M. every day of the week, serving breakfast, lunch,



*Sam and Emily Uglesich*

and dinner. Sam sponsored his brother, Tony, who came to America to help manage the family restaurant.

The menu was limited and consisted of egg, ham, roast beef, fried oyster and shrimp po-boys, as well as oysters on the half shell. The only plate items offered were fried oyster, shrimp, trout, or a combination. The restaurant consisted of only the two brothers, Helen, a long-time employee, and an oyster opener. They all worked extremely hard, with customers shouting their orders from front to back. Today, Anthony and Gail marvel at how they were able to keep everything straight.

Sam's only break came every Thursday night when the family gathered to have dinner or to attend a movie. His favorite food was garlic, and would routinely eat it with just bread. Today, a dish is proudly named in his behalf, Sam's Favorite, because it is prepared with lots of garlic.

As the brothers grew older, they decided to reduce the number of hours the restaurant was open. Tony passed away in 1964, a couple of months after his retirement. In 1969, Sam was diagnosed with prostate cancer, which led to his passing in 1974. Sam was able to visit his homeland several times, and was extremely proud that he was alive to see his son Anthony and his wife, Gail, take over the family business.





# Anthony Uglesich

Co-Owner

Since he was a teenager, Anthony has worked in the restaurant, learning the trade from his father, Sam, and Uncle Tony. He opened oysters, cleaned fish and shrimp, waited on the tables, and worked in the kitchen. Upon graduating from Fortier High School, Anthony attended Louisiana State University for a half semester. He left school to work full-time in the restaurant upon the passing of his Uncle Tony. Anthony later was drafted to serve his country during the Cuban Missile Crisis. After his two-year stint in the army, he returned to work full time in the restaurant, learning to manage the family business.

A typical day for Anthony begins at home on the telephone ordering produce and bread and checking on the delivery time with his usual suppliers. By 8:30 A.M., Anthony has arrived at the restaurant with his car full of plastic containers and pots that hold some of the sauces, gumbo, soups, and casseroles that were prepared the night before and in the morning. Before the restaurant opens, Anthony is busy making his own sauces and preparing such items as Mama's pasta, stuffed crabs and stuffed bell peppers. He also accepts and checks on all deliveries, and helps the employees with their prep work.

Anthony is known for having a good sense of humor and an open personality. He will help guide each customer to the popular dishes, new items, or the fresh seafood that arrived and is honest when a particular seafood is not offering the quality, size, or taste that is expected upon dining at Uglesich's. Anthony proudly states, "People trust me. If something's not running good, I'll say 'look, don't get it.'"

For instance, usually in the month of September oysters are small and not recommended. The untrue myth is that oysters run well in months that end with the letter "R." If a customer routinely orders the same item, it is not uncommon for Anthony to try to persuade that customer to try something new or different. He likes to give the example of a customer who had been coming in for years and had always ordered the shrimp po-boy. Anthony talked him into trying Paul's Fantasy, and to this day, the customer will not order anything else.

Upon the last customer's departure, Anthony is busy cleaning and washing the restaurant for the next business day. In his forty-five years of working at Uglesich's, Anthony has missed only two working days. Both times it was because he had undergone orthoscopic knee surgery.

Like his father, Sam, Anthony has always been proud that Uglesich's serves only fresh Louisiana seafood and not the less inexpensive imported food. Longstanding relationships have been developed with Louisiana suppliers for purchasing shrimp from Bobby Schwab, catfish and alligator from Joey and Jeannie Fonseca, and oysters from P & J Oysters. Anthony's integrity for the product being served is well respected by his peers and clientele.



# Gail Uglesich

Co-Owner

Gail is the second of two daughters of Ed and Jo Flettrich. Upon graduating from Ursuline High School, she attended three and half years of college at Loyola University, before transferring to the University of New Orleans. After a serious car accident, she was forced to drop out of college, but later received an internship as a student teacher in Jefferson Parish. She became a full-time teacher, instructing fourth and fifth grades, and would later meet Anthony on a blind date.

After her marriage, Gail left teaching and became involved in the restaurant by doing prep work in the kitchen. She did not know how to cook, yet self-taught herself to prepare meals for both herself and her husband. With her family expanding, Gail decided to work at home by rearing her children, yet still prepared dishes for the restaurant. It was during this time that she started to experiment with different dishes, and like today, Anthony was her tester.

With the children grown, Gail returned to the restaurant working twice a week, and continued to prepare dishes from home. As the business continued to grow, so did her work schedule. Today, she wakes up at 4:30 in the morning to begin preparing from scratch all the sauces, crab cakes, casseroles, gumbo, and other specialty dishes. Working every day, she arrives at the restaurant around 11 A.M. greeting customers as they walk through the door. She takes the customers' orders, makes all mixed drinks, and when needed cleans the tables and helps in the kitchen.

After she departs the restaurant at 4 P.M., Gail arrives at home to take care of the house and prepares dinner for her family. Like Anthony, her routine is the same the very next business day.



*Anthony and Gail Uglesich*

# Anthony and Gail

## Working as a Team

Anthony and Gail met on a blind date that was set up by a mutual friend. They dated for approximately one year and were married on December 28, 1963. After their marriage, the couple decided to take a loan and purchase the land and building where Uglesich's currently resides, and in 1966 purchased the restaurant from Sam Uglesich.

In 1974, Anthony and Gail began to expand the menu that today includes appetizers, soups, salads, and specialty items that are now barbecued, grilled, marinated, or sautéed, while still preserving the traditional fried seafood plates and sandwiches. Anthony and Gail work as a team, investigating and testing all new recipes by viewing cooking shows, reading numerous cookbooks and the food section of several national newspapers, and dining at restaurants across the United States. By substituting ingredients or adding to the seasoning to help bring out the taste, their version of the new recipe begins to take shape. It is then tested and tasted several times, before the final product is available. Both Anthony and Gail readily admit they are not chefs, yet classify themselves as cooks.

Owning and managing the restaurant requires Anthony and Gail to work seven days a week, while their weekends are occupied purchasing products and preparing the appetizers and sauces. As noted by Chef Emeril Lagasse, "Their teamwork is about 75 percent of their success." Both are committed to one another and to the restaurant. When asked why customers keep returning to Uglesich's, Gail quickly credits Anthony's personality and honesty in providing customers with a good quality product. While Anthony believes customers

“come for my wife Gail’s food. Our fish is fresh every day, straight from the waters. We buy most of our seafood directly from the fisherman and shrimpers—no middleman holds it up and adds his tariff, which is why our prices are fair.” It is this through this teamwork that Uglesich’s is still a New Orleans tradition.



# A Daughter and a Son

Donna Uglesich and John Uglesich

Anthony and Gail have two children, a daughter, Donna, and a son, John. Like most parents, they wanted to give their children a chance for a quality education and an opportunity to have a better life. They worked extremely hard to finance their education and are proud that both children received a college degree.

Having graduated from McGehee School in 1982, Donna attended and graduated from Tulane University with a bachelor of arts degree in Sociology. She later received her master's from Tulane University in social psychology. Today she is the manager and president of National Fence Corporation, which was started by her grandfather. John graduated from De La Salle High School in 1986 and graduated from Tulane University with a bachelor of arts degree. He actively manages stock portfolios.

Many people have questioned whether Donna or John will take over the family business. Both have seen first hand how their parents have dedicated their lives seven days a week while continuing to manage and oversee every aspect of the business. Neither Anthony nor Gail forced their children into the business and they respect them for having made their own career decisions.