

Nick: a knack for doing it right

One of my favorite expressions is "That, (whatever subject is being discussed) and a buck and a half will get you a cup of coffee at Nick's."

The implication is that the item in question is worth so little that if you add a dollar and change, all you can trade it for is that cup of coffee at Pacifica's favorite shoreside restaurant. Actually you can buy a cup of coffee at Nick's for \$1.25, but the waitress deserves a tip, doesn't she?

You can count on the fingers of one hand restaurants in the Bay Area still in the same family after 70 years. Not having deeply researched the subject, for all I know it might be one finger. Tadich Grill and Fior D'Italia have been around since the 19th century in San Francisco, but they've been sold a time or two. There's also a Mexican restaurant in Oakland there since 1927. Same family ownership? I don't know.

Anyone who asks me for advice is told not to go into the restaurant business. Too chancy. Too volatile. Too risky. So how did and do Nick Gust and the two Charles Gusts make it look easy? Actually all you need is the right location, perseverance, skill, good judgment, persistence, a series of good bookkeepers, loyal employees, hard working wives, and a fair amount of luck. That's what it takes to win the lottery twice.

Nick's has had rocks thrown through

The Reactor

Paul Azevedo



his windows, his parking lot heavily damaged, his neighbors put out of business from time to time, and that was just Mother Nature. In addition he's had political arguments and a few unfriendly neighbors who stopped him from building a certain hotel. He opposed incorporation, but he put that aside to be elected to the City Council and serve as Mayor more times than anybody.

Though actually very shy, he's overcome it so well you wouldn't know it. There's a very good argument that he's the Pacifican best known outside Pacifica, though Kevin Gogan, Rob Schneider and Grace McCarthy might give me an argument. It's true he's never been in a 49er game as a player, on either side. But then he doesn't weigh 330 lb., or have his own TV show, nor has he been on the county Planning Commission.

In recent years, as Nick's gets closer to three-quarters of a century and more, Nick has celebrated the anniversary

with Greek style belly dancing. He's smart enough to hire others to do it, and just provide the Greek hors d'oeuvres. As I've pointed out to my wife, it's the music I like. It's true. I developed a taste for Greek and middle eastern music while I was in the army in Europe. I heard it on short wave.

The only major danger with Nick and Nick's is that we may take him and it for granted. The restaurant was here before almost any of the rest of us, and may be here after we all leave. But, like every restaurant, it has to face the bottom line each day. Most restaurants fail that test sooner or later. Even the ones that persist usually do it with new owners from time to time. There's only one word that fits a restaurant, or any business, that shows the longevity of the Rockaway Cafe, aka Nick's. CONGRATULATIONS!

Paul Azevedo has written The Reactor for more than two decades. He has been to Nick's many, many times.

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