

Rita and Paul Meier

This week we are happy to name Rita and Paul Meier as the 117th and 118th inductees in Marshfield's 150: Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present register. Rita and Paul were nominated by Eileen Kelz.

Chances are that if you've gone out for a Friday fish fry you ate at the Blue Heron Brew Pub where you were greeted with the smiles of Rita and Paul Meier. Rita and Paul, as well as partners Joe and Cari Loos and Tom and Paula Hinke opened the Brew Pub in the historic Parkin Dairy building in Marshfield.



Owning a restaurant is hard work so the couple did not go into the enterprise lightly. Rita earned a degree in business through the University of Minnesota and had plenty of other entrepreneurial experience. Also, being raised on a farm in rural Paynesville, MN, Rita had a strong work ethic. Paul as an obstetrician for high risk pregnancies at the Marshfield Clinic was also used to long hours and hard dedicated work.

So, when the opportunity arose to buy the former Parkin Dairy Building, they dove in. Paul had a strong vision for the restaurant. He loved good food and saw a need for an informal gathering place to eat and build community. Part of their vision included a micro-brewery, so they reached out to the Central Waters Brewing Company to complete the picture.

Rita originally arrived in Marshfield to follow her spouse, Mike Lindquist, for his new job. Rita stayed home to raise their children, now adults, Jonathon, Natalie, and Allison. All three kids attended and graduated from the School District of Marshfield.

The couple divorced in 1995 so Rita then returned to the paid workforce. Her previous employment was with Honeywell in Minneapolis as a contract manager. In Marshfield she went to work as a sales consultant for Weekenders Casual Wear where she excelled with a sales force of five other women under her management. She was on track to be a Weekender's Manager when the opportunity arose to work for Security Health Plan in Marshfield as a Sales Coordinator. She then moved on to Prudential in 1999, obtaining her insurance and securities licenses to become a financial advisor, and later worked for Catholic Knights and Forward Financial Services.

In 2000 Rita married her "soulmate," Paul Meier. They worked well together whether it was growing their blended family of seven into adulthood, running a restaurant or participating in community activities.

When the Parkin building, home of the former Parkin Dairy, went up for sale in 2004, Rita and Paul and the partners decided that the building had great potential as a restaurant. They formed partnerships with the Loos's and Hinke's, purchased the building and did extensive remodeling while maintaining the integrity of the building which is on the Federal Register of Historic Places. West 14th and the brew pub had its much anticipated opening in 2005. They successfully ran the restaurant with the casual Blue Heron Brew Pub downstairs and a more formal dining space upstairs.

When the Loos's left the partnership in 2009, Rita made the decision to resign her financial advisor job to manage the restaurant. The greatest challenge that Rita found to being a restaurateur was juggling all the moving parts such as staffing, keeping equipment running, finance and food quality. The most rewarding aspect according to Meier was when it all came into balance and all the parts were running smoothly. After Paul's retirement from the Marshfield Clinic in 2012, he came to work alongside Rita each day and/or evening. When Paul began to experience some health issues, they made the decision to sell the restaurant. They could have closed the restaurant down but their vision for good food and a community gathering space stood strong, so they decided to find a buyer. Their commitment to Marshfield prevailed to the end. They knew that their many friends and patrons would be disappointed so the business was sold to Justin and Renee Graff who they felt would keep the friendly business going with the same integrity and vision.

On top of her business acumen, the term "Minnesota Nice" applies to Rita. She is a truly kind individual who likes to be "on the go" and achieve things. The fact that Rita has remained strong friends with the Hinkes throughout the pressures and difficulties of their business together speaks volumes to the kind of person she is. Paula Hinke says of her former restaurant partner, "Rita is a wonderful woman. She is kind, caring and considerate of others. If there is a problem, she evaluates the entire situation and how various actions will affect everyone involved, in business and everyday life."

Rita's commitment to the Marshfield community extended beyond the restaurant. She served on the UW-Marshfield/Wood County Foundation Board with a stint as president. While a member of the board, the foundation started "Food for Thought" a successful fundraiser. She also served on the board of St. Joseph's Hospital Foundation with the last two years as its president. The foundation managed and approved the use of and raised funds to purchase items, services, or training that the hospital didn't have in their budget.

Rita was also a big supporter of Mainstreet Marshfield where she served on the board with the last years as president. In that role she accomplished the hiring of a new executive director of Mainstreet and initiated the Tuesday Downtown Farmer's Market and the Antique Tractor Show while coordinating concerts and festivals around town for events like Hub City Days.

Sadly, Paul passed away in 2023. Rita is now moving ahead with life and figuring out what is next. While temporarily retired, with Rita's drive, commitment and energy, she will continue benefiting the Marshfield community.