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**Bavarian Inn Marks 125Years of Service, Memories and Chicken**

***One of America’s Oldest Restaurants Celebrates 125 Years in Business***

Frankenmuth, Mich., Feb. 5, 2013 – What started in 1888 as a boarding house for Michigan’s first travelers is celebrating 125 years of serving delicious meals, including its world-famous chicken dinners. [Bavarian Inn](http://www.bavarianinn.com), Michigan’s iconic Bavarian-themed restaurant, joins a short list of eateries by marking its 125th anniversary of continuous operation this year.

“With the help of God, the community and our team members, we’ve created cherished memories for millions of guests,” said Dorothy Zehnder, the 91-year-old family matriarch and co-founder of the Bavarian Inn. “We are a family motivated by hospitality and service to others, and our work continues to be a blessing for us each day.”

Service, hard work and a love of family are three ingredients responsible for the Zehnder family’s success. Even on their days off, you’ll find brothers, cousins and grandchildren cooking together and sharing a meal. Every Monday, Dorothy can be found in her kitchen at home baking with grandchildren eager to learn the business.

The Bavarian Inn, which began life as the Union House, has been owned by just two families and is now in its seventh generation of management. German immigrant Theodore Fischer built the Union House and originated the now famous “all-you-can-eat” chicken dinners. It later became Fischer’s Hotel and was purchased by William Zehnder, Sr. in February 1950; he named son William “Tiny” and wife Dorothy as managers.

Tiny, a former farmer, and Dorothy, who began waitressing at Fischer’s at age 16, set out to put Frankenmuth on the map and -- along with brothers Eddie and Leonard Zehnder and friend Wally Bronner -- forever changed the face of mid-Michigan.

Rather than close the restaurant’s doors during the 1957 recession, Tiny boldly chose to expand. He spearheaded the transformation of Frankenmuth into Michigan’s “Little Bavaria” and changed the restaurant’s name and architecture to reflect its German heritage. As the remodeled and renamed “Frankenmuth Bavarian Inn” the restaurant became an immediate tourist attraction that spawned other family businesses including gift and food shops and later, the Bavarian Inn Lodge.

Bavarian Inn has become one of the oldest and largest eateries in the country. It possesses all of the “must-have” characteristics of long-term success, including a timeless design, a popular menu and a loyal clientele.

However, Bill Zehnder, third generation owner and current restaurant president, attributes the success of Bavarian Inn to something even more important, his family.

“My father often said, ‘Family is everything,’” he said. “We continue to live by that philosophy. We have a shared history and a shared moral code. We grew up together, worshiped, worked and played together. We truly cherish and respect each other. In business, we adhere to a creed based on our shared values and vision. Work is an extension of our family bond.”

Zehnder also believes the restaurant’s longevity is an evolving blend of tradition, continuity, adaptation and growth.

“Our business has been evolving since dad changed the sign on the door,” he said. “My sister Judy and I have been blessed with an incredible foundation. It’s up to us, our spouses Karen and Don, our mother and children to make Bavarian Inn relevant in 2013 and beyond. That means listening to the customer and providing healthy options, exceptional value and great service. It means forever staying true to my grandfather’s vision. We have 125 years of customer expectations to honor.”

Today the restaurant seats 1,200 guests in 12 dining rooms and serves over 600,000 meals annually. There are currently five fourth-generation Zehnders in various areas of management -- Amy, Michael, Katie, William and Martha. The family has branched into new businesses, including the Castle Shops, [Frankenmuth Cheese Haus](http://frankenmuthcheesehaus.com/), [Covered Bridge & Leather Gift Shop](http://bavarianinn.com/shop/covered-bridge-and-leather-shop) and Frankenmuth River Place Shops, an outdoor mall modeled after a quaint Bavarian village. The Bavarian Inn Lodge, built in 1986, completed a $3 million renovation in late 2012 featuring two indoor water slides and updates to its 35,000 square-foot family entertainment venue. It is the highest ranked family resort in the state according to online travel site TripAdvisor. The seven-acre facility offers 360 rooms and has been host to President George H. W. Bush and all the Michigan governors dating back to G. Mennen Williams.

Like her mother Dorothy, Judy Zehnder Keller, president and founder of the Lodge, began her career waitressing at the restaurant at a young age.

“I’d like to think I have the best qualities of my mother and my father combined,” she said. “I believe we all do. Another of my father’s mottos was, ‘This business shall continue forever.’We try to emulate the strengths of our exceptional role models and pass those traits along. In that way, they will both live forever.”

Judy’s son Michael Keller Zehnder, Lodge General Manager and fourth generation owner, agrees.

“The secret ingredient is the work ethic Tiny and Dorothy instilled in their children and us, the grandchildren,” he said. “Add to that our thousands of dedicated team members -- many of whom have been with us through multiple generations -- and our guests, especially those who came to Bavarian Inn as children and who are now bringing their grandchildren. That is our recipe for success.”

**About Bavarian Inn**

Celebrating 125 years of service this year, the Bavarian Inn Restaurant has become a Michigan landmark. Generations of diners, lodgers and tourists from around the globe have discovered true Bavarian hospitality thanks to Dorothy and her late husband William “Tiny” Zehnder. Guests experience the old-world European charm of the Bavarian Inn – whether it’s the famous chicken dinners, fresh baked goods or Michigan’s greatest selection of German beer. Bavarian Inn also prides itself on being one of the top consumers of Pure Michigan agricultural products. Nestled within a backdrop of authentic German architecture, a variety of shops and other fun activities, a trip to Frankenmuth would not be complete without a visit to the Bavarian Inn. Learn more at [www.bavarianinn.com](http://www.bavarianinn.com).

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