

# Small Business Spotlight

| Chicken Annie's Girard

| May 14, 2020

Natives to Crawford County certainly understand the tradition of Southeast Kansas fried chicken... rich in history from its early origins. When Ann Pichler's husband was disabled in a coal mining accident over eighty years ago, she began cooking out of her home to feed other miners. Annie's reputation spread over the region, other fried chicken restaurants were established around the county and the rest, as they say, is history.

In 1971, Annie's granddaughter opened a Chicken Annie's restaurant just west of Girard and thirteen years later, in June of 1984, Bob Zagonel (also kin to the Annie's lineage) and his wife, Carolyn, purchased the business and began their journey into entrepreneurship. Over the past 35 years, the couple has worked side by side in the kitchen every Wednesday-Sunday, serving up traditional SEK Fried Chicken and much, much more.

Bob and Carolyn view their customers as an extended family.

"The personal service we give our customers allows us to really get to know them," Carolyn said. "My favorite parts of the job are seeing others enjoy our food and getting to see friends frequently. A lot of our customers have become more than just frequent customers, they are more of an extended family."

The family nature has been proven helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the traditional dine-in experience was eliminated, Chicken Annie's Girard remained open for curbside service and continued to serve their long-time customers with a smile. "Dine in only" birthday club coupons were accepted on curbside orders and several "chicken on the go" dates were held in neighboring towns such as Parsons and Fort Scott.

"Our staff was able to adapt to all of the new procedures well and that has helped us through this time," Carolyn said.

Outside of the restaurant, the Zagonels also have a strong reputation in the Girard area for giving back.

"Because the community has supported us through the years so well, we were able to become the business we are today," Carolyn said. "Other businesses in our community are there to support each other, too. I've found that when you need something, all you need to do is ask and they will come through."

Chicken Annie's Girard has been involved with giving back to many organizations within the community through fundraisers, volunteer hours, special events and much, much more. From their alma mater USD 248 to organizations such as Celebrate Girard and Angels Among Us, to larger initiatives like breast cancer and cystic fibrosis awareness, Bob and Carolyn believe in giving back to the community that has supported them so well over the years.

When asked for one thing that she hoped customers would always take away from their experience at Chicken Annie's Girard, Carolyn stuck with tradition.

"Our business is a long family tradition handed down from previous generations and we are still doing it with the same recipes. Also, chicken bones, we hope they will take lots of chicken bones. Ha ha!"

Chicken Annie's Girard opened their dining room with limited seating and social distancing procedures in place on Wed, May 6<sup>th</sup>.