

Success Story

M Restaurant

The Morris House Hotel
Philadelphia, PA

Restaurant Type:
Fine Dining

In Business Since:
1787

Current Owner Since:
2000

Joined Rewards Network to:

- Fund renovations and updates
- Attract customers who spend more
- Get verified customer feedback

Our success is threefold.

Restaurant owners have a lot on their plates — from keeping operations running smoothly and motivating a hard-working team, to balancing finances with short and long term improvement plans.

Now imagine doing all that in one of the most historic buildings in the heart of American history.

Gene Lefevre and Mike DiPaolo have focused on historic preservation and renovation for their whole professional careers. After watching it sit vacant for seven long years, falling apart room by room, they bought The Morris Hotel in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 2000. They spent three years restoring it back to its original glory, and in the process, opened **M Restaurant**.

“Our success is threefold,” said Deborah Boardman-Lefevre, co-owner of M Restaurant. “First, our loyal customers; second, our incredible team, both on the management and service side; and third, the sense of family that permeates our principals of providing a work atmosphere of diversity and mutual respect, and a commitment to always challenge each other to be the best we can be.”

It all started in 2011 with a kitchen expansion — but it certainly didn't stop there.



And if all that isn't enough, the Lefevres also own a farm in New Jersey, where they grow a substantial amount of the vegetables served in the restaurant.

"When we opened M in 2003, over 13 years ago, we were one of the first restaurants that wanted to focus on farm to table," Boardman-Lefevre shared. "We go one step further and, in fact, do a 'seed-to-table' theme since we start our vegetables from non-GMO seeds."

"We do it all ourselves from starting the seeds in our greenhouse, to transplanting them, weeding, watering, the back-breaking job of harvesting, cleaning vegetables, weighing them, documenting the amount brought in, transporting them to Philly, and then unloading the many pounds of produce and herbs weekly in our walk-in at M."

Onsite, M Restaurant has gone through consistent growth, season after season, as well. It all started in 2011 with a kitchen expansion — but it certainly didn't stop there.

It's all in the details.

"The original kitchen was 20 by 25 feet. It was a postage stamp!" Boardman-Lefevre described, with a nod toward the opportunity an expansion could provide. "With such a glorious, quaint, and unique property, we wanted to expand in 2011 and take on doing weddings ourselves. In the past, we had rented out the venue to other event planners and chefs."

"We also doubled our bar space and my husband Gene designed an incredible outdoor bar that uniquely wraps itself around a 40-foot holly tree in our garden! That has been huge for



us because now there is an oasis with a central bar that completes our cocktail area.”

Between these two major renovations, M Restaurant was poised to attract more business than ever, with versatility to host any number of events and a larger number of guests than ever.

They also renovated the library in the historic hotel, painted the walls, and had a period mural painted above the mantle by Bill Whiting, a local artist. All the carpeting in the building has been replaced over time, and all the outside woodwork on both the hotel and restaurant were repainted and renovated. That was no easy task, in fact, because the integrity of the historic home had to be respected in the process.

Nevertheless, the owners were undaunted.

“It is always important to have regular upgrades and to keep the property fresh because it is all about the details,” Boardman-Lefevre added. “I have always said this. It is all about the details, and for discerning eyes, we try to keep ahead of the curve and keep all those details in check daily.”

Funding a long list of improvements is no easy feat, however. With nearly every restaurant experiencing slow periods, sometimes unexpectedly, feeling secure enough in the business’s cash flow to make a commitment to renovation is a significant challenge.

How are we going to afford this?

“We always prioritize and try to do upgrades at a time when our cash flow is consistent,” explains Boardman-Lefevre. “Those months for us are the wedding months, but now that we have a clear-

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M
RESTAURANT
at the
MORRIS
HOUSE
HOTEL

top tent up eight months a year, we can offer weatherproof dining with a garden experience, even if it is raining.”

Planning ahead and making renovations that can experience an immediate return on investment is certainly part of the puzzle. But knowing what your options are outside of immediate resources — or traditional bank loans that many restaurateurs struggle to get approved for — can help get you the rest of the way.

Financing through Rewards Network has a quick and easy application process, respects the ebb and flow of a restaurant’s business, and has one more big advantage — automatic inclusion in their marketing program. Rewards Network gives its restaurants access to its base of over 17 million consumers — big brand loyalty members that typically spend 25% more than other customers and dine more often than average, as well.

“A partnership with Rewards Network offers a solution that answers all your questions of ‘How are we going to afford this?’” claims Boardman-Lefevre. “Their business model lets everyone



fulfill their dreams with a win-win relationship of filling seats in slower times, bringing in happy return customers, having an average customer with a higher check average than others, and an affordable financing model that lets you continue to prosper while maintaining your sanity!”

“Our partnership with Rewards Network has allowed a small, family-run business like us to triple our income in five years.” Boardman-Lefevre boasted happily. “It’s also helped us live our dream of having a one-of-a-kind boutique hotel, restaurant, and event space that literally feels like you are, in fact, in the south of France. The renovations, additions and upgrades have helped us stay competitive and to stay afloat in this ever changing world of hospitality and culinary arts.”

Want to be our next success story?

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