

THINGS TO DO > RESTAURANTS, FOOD AND DRINK

## Kitchen nightmare turns into opportunity for Walsh College and Boodles restaurant



Greeting his guest is Bruno Ferguson, who immigrated to the U.S. from Italy and learned the restaurant business as a young man living in New York City, before opening Boodles restaurant in Madison Heights. Forty-years and several struggles later he and his son are working to promote what remains a popular eatery, where patrons from the east side meet those from the west side. (Gina Joseph – The Macomb Daily)



“Kitchen Nightmares” Chef Gordon Ramsay made a stop at a Madison Heights establishment, [Boodles](#), over the summer and while the popular reality show is meant to help struggling restaurants his visit left a bad taste in everyone’s mouth.

“I don’t think it helped us at all,” said Bruno Ferguson, who immigrated to the United States from Italy and learned the restaurant business as a young man living in New York City before marrying a girl from Michigan and opening up Boodles in Madison Heights.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the popular eatery.



Bruno Ferguson, left, and his son Kevin Ferguson, owner and manager of Boodles in Madison Heights will be hosting events Dec. 4 and 6, put on by Walsh College students, hoping to promote the restaurant's 40th anniversary while also gaining real-world experience in an events and marketing class. (Gina Joseph – The Macomb Daily)

Over the years Bruno and his son, Kevin Ferguson, who manages the restaurant have faced more than a few business struggles including the ongoing construction at 11 Mile Road and Interstate-75 where the restaurant is located, and the pandemic. Bruno was forced to close his doors during the COVID lockdown and being unable to transition from dining in to takeout nearly went bankrupt. A year later and to the delight of patrons, who love the restaurant for its classic charm and New York style decor including a baby grand piano, they were able to reopen.





The seasoned restaurant owner admits Ramsay was right about not using canned or frozen ingredients, and the upgrades he made to the restaurant including chandeliers and new chairs, tables and barstools, look great.

His customers were also happy to see some old favorites back on the menu including Boodles' famous table-made Caesar salad, Saganaki, crab stuffed mushrooms and chicken parmesan.

However, Ramsay's visit was an intense experience and while good for ratings did not boost their business.

Caroline St. Clair believes her students can do just that.

"I love the food and I love the vibe," said St. Clair, an academic advisor at Walsh College with a background in event planning and marketing.

"It's very much a 'Cheers' vibe," she added, in reference to the cozy bar in Boston where everyone knows your name.

Ruthanne Hardy concurred.

"I felt it when I first walked in here," said the hostess, who has been working at the restaurant for more than 25 years. "It had this warm and friendly feel about it."

And it's not just the atmosphere.

Hardy said Bruno is a great boss.

"He never tells you to do something here that he wouldn't do himself," she said.

That was evident by the way he rolled up his sleeves and took on the role of dishwasher when Ramsay's visit to the restaurant had several staff members deciding they did not want to be part of the show.

It's this warm and inviting atmosphere and great food students at Walsh College hope to tap for two promotional parties they've planned as part of their events and marketing class. The new program created by St. Clair with the college's approval not only aims to help businesses in the community but provides students with something fun and rewarding to do.

“I’ve loved facilitating this class at Walsh College,” St. Clair said. “Our ethos is simple: real-world learning delivered by faculty who practice what they teach. Bringing my marketing and event-planning experience together with our students and Boodles to build these December events has been immensely rewarding. I am thankful to our dean, Dr. Dave Schippers for supporting my version to update the course and assist a local, family-owned business that has a history of supporting Walsh College through sponsorship over the years.”

Among the students applauding St. Clair’s initiative is Eric Lombardo of Clinton Township, a local chef pursuing a bachelor of science degree in applied management.

“This hands-on course has allowed me to apply analytical thinking and strategic marketing principles to a real business scenario,” said Lombardo. “For 40 years, Boodles has defined the classic steakhouse experience where timeless tradition meets modern sophistication. As it marks this milestone anniversary, Boodles looks toward the future with the same passion for excellence that has made it a local favorite for generations.”





Sweet chocolate covers Boodles' Bumpy Cake, a favorite dessert at the Madison Heights eatery. (Photo courtesy of Boodles)

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Looking to give Boodles a try?

Have a look at the events coming up planned by Walsh College students:

- Boodles and Beyond on Dec. 4 — On this night students have planned a high-energy grand-tasting relaunch of the restaurant with live music and a three course dinner featuring Boodles favorite dishes and wine pairings chosen by Boodles' sommelier Keven Ferguson.
- Aged to Perfection on Dec. 6 — For this night students have planned an elegant nostalgia-forward evening honoring four decades of Boodles with live music, customer favorite dishes, wine pairings and curated retro cocktails and mocktails.



Boodles' manager Kevin Ferguson, left, stands with Caroline St. Clair, a professor at Walsh College, whose genuine interest in promoting the restaurant led to the creation of a hands-on events and marketing class that gives students real-world experience. (Gina Joseph – The Macomb Daily)

Both Bruno and Kevin are excited about the events.

“I like the idea. I think they came up with a good plan,” Kevin said. “We can use the help and it’s an opportunity for the students to gain real experience in helping local restaurants.”

Boodles is at 935 W. 11 Mile Rd., in Madison Heights.

For more information visit [facebook.com/BoodlesDetroit/](https://facebook.com/BoodlesDetroit/).