

Patrick Elwell, Seasoned Restaurateur Re-opens Iconic Downtown AH Eatery

by Irena Granaas

A well-liked, much-admired restaurateur with deep local roots is back in the game.

Following a 10-year retirement from the business, Patrick Elwell has put out the welcome mat at the same site he where ran a restaurant for many years. He is once again doing what he loves best – serving up excellent food and mingling with returning customers while making friends with new visitors to his establishment, formerly called Patrick's, now named the Elwell Grill.

The *Oakland Tech News* caught up with the busy Elwell, 75, at the Grill, located in downtown Auburn Hills for a convivial conversation.

"I think the important thing is that I'm an entrepreneurial type of operation. I'm a small business," he said. "I don't particularly like to play my age as something, because I don't think age is the important thing . . . What's more important is I retired for 10 years, I leased the building out and I worked various jobs that I enjoyed, but the restaurant is my first love."

Elwell, a resident of the Auburn Hills area for 50 years, combines a lot of pride, passion and love of people in order to treat customers to the what he describes as the "upscale casual" dining experience at the Elwell Grill.

"I enjoy being back for the fellowship with the customers, I enjoy the challenge of trying to build something – again," Elwell said. "It's the potential. And I have a lot of my old employees here that came back to work."

Elwell's philosophy is to present high-quality food that is well-prepared, and to serve it in a family-friendly atmosphere that has a lot of warmth.

There's a definite sense that the Elwell Grill is here to stay.

"It goes back to painting the picture of success," he said. "Because people like to be with successful people. I could have done it cheaper but that's not the way I do it. Take your customer – you must meet him at the door, then you have to serve a good meal with a quality bottle of wine."

The restaurant features an American-style menu, with a lot of "comfort foods," including staples like salads, sandwiches, fish, soup and meats, as well as specialty dishes like Elwell's pan-fried chicken breast that is a favorite with many customers.

"I buy nothing with a coating on it, Everything is done straight from scratch," Elwell explained. "One of my signature dishes is my pan-fried chicken. Basically, it's just my method of cooking . . . I can walk back (to the kitchen) and tell if it's going to be good, and if it's not, I tell them to throw it out and start fresh."

Elwell's filets and Delmonico steaks are made from certified Angus beef. Whitefish and salmon with Hollandaise sauce are among notable selections, and frog legs are popular with customers on Monday nights.

Pride is the key, Elwell emphasized.

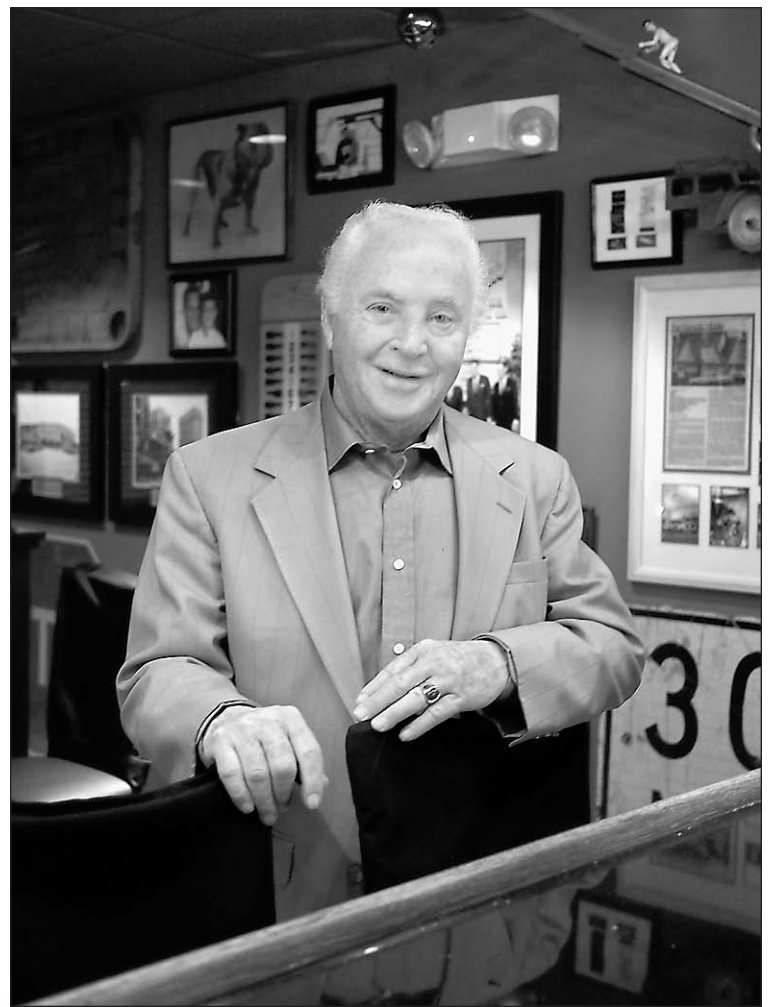
"It's your character," he said. "There are certain things you won't compromise on, and there are certain things you won't do . . . You're going to go awry, it's human nature, but you have to self correct. Take the people I surround myself with – if they don't have pride, it's detrimental."

In keeping with the family ambience, Elwell has photos of his family and relevant events on the walls. Elwell is proud of both of his children, daughter Kelly Talmer and son Patrick, who work with him at the Grill.

Patrick lends his talents to cooking, while Kelly pitches in as part of the management when Elwell needs them. He also praised his niece, Dawn Hurren, who works in the kitchen and, and his day manager, Maureen Glen.

Elwell bought the original restaurant, called Stewart's Diner, in 1964 from Mel Stewart, which was at the same location where Elwell's Grill stands today.

He operated it for two years before he remodeled and re-opened it as the Shalea Inn. Later the name changed to Patrick's



Patrick Elwell, restaurateur

– portrait by Bill Springer

Shalea Inn. After a fire in 1987 it re-opened as simply Patrick's.

Elwell's establishment has received its share of acclaim over the years. According to Elwell, his restaurant earned an award every year until the fire from 1970 to 1987

from *Travel Holiday* magazine. Positive reviews of his restaurant and cuisine have also run in *AAA Motor News*, *The Ford Times* and various other publications.

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