

Young's Restaurant leads way for green dining

By Geoffrey Cunningham, Staff Writer

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For 89 years, Young's Restaurant has been a Main Street staple for UNH students and members of the surrounding communities. But there is something about the small family-owned business that many may overlook. The Durham diner has steadily been becoming a green restaurant.

All of Young's paper products are made from 100 percent recyclable paper, the take-out containers are compostable, outside air is cycled through the building in order to use less air-conditioning and energy, and the waste from the restaurant is composted.

Ken Young, who owns Young's Restaurant with his wife Cathy, said that being a green business is simply the right thing to do.

"Some of this stuff is just common sense," said Young. "We've been a real throw-away society for a while, really since World War II. This is just the right thing to do."

Young's Restaurant has been in business since 1916 and was originally owned by the Grant family until Dick Young, Ken's father, took over in 1968. As a teenager, Young worked in the restaurant for his father, doing everything from washing dishes to working the register and cooking.

"If there was something that had to be done, I did it," said Young.

When his father retired in 1990, Young took up the reins of the restaurant. He said that improving green efficiency has always been a part of the business.

"We've been doing this stuff for awhile," Young said.

It was 15 years ago when Young had energy efficient lighting installed in the restaurant. It's things like this that Young said go a long way to being environmentally sound.

"It's the little things that make you sustainable," said Young. "Although it may be more expensive at the time, if you pay attention to your business, in the long run it's worth it."

One particularly unique feature of Young's Restaurant is the location of the ice machine and refrigeration compressors. Instead of being located in the kitchen where it can become very warm, the compressors are in the basement. This cuts down on the electricity needed for them, as well as maintenance costs.

Young's paper products are provided by Tork, a subsidiary of SCA Tissue North America, which, according to Young, is the second greenest company in the world.

During renovations to the restaurant in 2007, Young had a wooden floor installed in the main dining area that was made from 100 percent recycled wood. Also, all of the cleaning products used are pH friendly cleaners.

Young is a big advocate for local food products, as well. About 70 percent of all goods and services are provided by PFG NorthCenter in Maine. In dealing with one main vendor, man power, equipment, and transportation are limited.

Young is currently working on the next menu for the restaurant, which will also include meats from North Country Smokehouse in Claremont, NH, as well as healthier organic and all natural products for customers to choose from.

“We are diligent about working locally, but there’s a lot more work to be done,” said Young. “We’re making huge steps in the right direction.”

These steps led Young to the Green Alliance over the summer when he attended the Newmarket Farmer’s Market and saw a table held by the organization.

“All I did was read the flyers and their website,” said Young. “I told my wife that we were joining because it was the right thing to do.”

The Green Alliance is an organization out of Portsmouth, N.H. whose mission is to promote businesses that are exceptionally green efficient, and make efforts to increase the profits of those businesses. It is also meant to educate and influence the public to think about the goods they buy. Young’s has been a member since August and accepts the Green Alliance discount card, which gives customers 10 percent off their bill.

Sarah Brown, director of the Green Alliance, said that Young’s Restaurant is a great example of a small business working hard to increase sustainability.

“Young’s is a real old-fashioned New England small business and it’s very inspiring to see a place like it embrace sustainability,” said Brown. “It means anybody can do it.”

From a financial standpoint, Brown said she is impressed because being sustainable can sometimes mean higher costs.

“Financially, it’s very heartening that a business like this can do it,” said Brown.

Young said it can be more expensive to be green than not. For example, the napkins cost \$10 more per case than other options.

In regards to the new partnership with the Green Alliance, Young is excited and hopes it will help spread the word about his green business.

“It’s about networking and getting the word out there,” said Young. “This movement is going to get bigger and grow.”