



## Preserving A Legacy

An Interview with Alan Rosen,  
Third Generation and Owner, Junior's



Junior's cheesecake (left and above);  
the exterior of Junior's in Brooklyn (below)

**EDITORS' NOTE** Alan Rosen joined Junior's in 1992 and has since orchestrated changes that have substantially increased sales. As a graduate from Cornell University's School of Hotel Management, his boldest move was to expand into Manhattan with the first expansion of the eatery since his grandfather opened it half a century ago. Rosen built two outlets in Grand Central Terminal: a \$1-million restaurant and a separate retail shop.



Alan Rosen

**COMPANY BRIEF** Standing on the corner of Flatbush and Dekalb Avenues in downtown Brooklyn, New York (386 Flatbush Avenue Ext), Junior's Restaurant (juniorscheesecake.com) is home to the World's Most Fabulous® Cheesecake, and for over 50 years has played host to famous singers, authors, movie stars, athletes, mayors, and Supreme Court Justices. There is an additional bakery in Grand Central Terminal and a restaurant in Times Square, as well as a restaurant at the MGM Grand Hotel at Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut. Junior's also has two licenses in Barclay's Center, as well as a wholesale business and a television sales business on QVC.

### How have you remained current while maintaining the restaurant's history and heritage?

I'm not just running a restaurant business or a baking business that makes great cheesecake – I'm preserving a legacy and carrying on an iconic brand that is identified with Brooklyn, New York and Manhattan. I take that responsibility very seriously.

We're not just delivering food or serving cheesecake – we're creating great memories for people. We're living up to a promise that was introduced to them in their childhood that Junior's will always be great. We need to continue not just to meet that expectation but to exceed it because people's memories are always greater than reality.

We stay current by remaining true to our roots and who we are. We haven't strayed from that mission. In 1950, my grandfather decided that if we're going to be a great restaurant in New York, we have to have great cheesecake. So we have great cheesecake, great food, and great value, and we deliver what's current and fresh. However, guests still feel like they're in an establishment with a heritage.

### How broad are the opportunities for growth, and is it important to not lose the family feel?

We just opened in Korea and it is doing unbelievably well, and we're also in Japan. We have

our eyes on Dubai and we have a lot of locations in the U.S. where we still need to open.

Junior's is going to be a global brand but we will carefully pick our spots – we're not just going to jump in everywhere. We know that we can be a bigger and better company, so we don't get complacent; we're always striving for more. However, we're not going to overstep our bounds. We know that we're only as good as the next thing we do.

I don't want to be the biggest, but I do want to be one of the best.

### When you're so well-known for your cheesecake, is it hard to raise awareness of the quality of your entire menu?

While we get great respect and love for our cheesecake, our customers know that we have great food because they eat here every day. But when you say "Junior's" people do say "cheesecake," so I also want them to think highly of our food.



People still reference what they used to eat at Junior's in the '50s and '60s so we're doing all that, but as a global brand right now, the cheesecake has the greatest reach. Because of the mail order business, we can reach parts of the U.S. that we can't reach with our retail presence.

### Have you attempted to incorporate a healthy concept into your menu?

If I'm going to have a piece of cake in the next week, it might as well be the best, most delicious, creamy, smooth piece of cake I could ever have because it will have the same amount of calories regardless. Plus, our cheesecakes have cream cheese, heavy cream, fresh eggs, sugar, and vanilla – there is nothing that crazy in there. We make it the same way it was made when my grandfather started the business.

### What qualities do you look for in your servers?

They have to be talkers, but they also have to be smart enough to know how to read a guest. For instance, they need to know that when two businessmen are having a conversation, they need less interaction than those who are from out of town and going to a show. So we want people who are communicative, friendly, and bright.

Years ago, when my dad and uncle ran this business, they would test servers to see how many plates they could carry up their arms. I realized I could teach anyone how to carry plates, but I could not teach someone how to be compassionate. In this hard-driving business, being a server at Junior's is not an easy job. As owners and managers of this business, we have recognized that, which has helped us become a better operation over the years. We now have tons of long-time employees.

### How do you maintain the family feel?

It helps that my 80-year-old father still works with me. We're also not that big yet – we have four stores in the U.S., and I can still touch every one each day.

I also have great people working for me – they're the stewards of the brand and they understand that. They get me, and they get what it is that we're really delivering. We just need to remain sharp and not take anything for granted.

### How did you become involved with the Barclay's Center?

As a guest, I love going there. It's great for the community, for the borough, and for the entire city. It's a win-win-win-win-win.

We have a small presence there with two stores inside of Barclay's. One is a dessert shop and one has a couple of Junior's menu items. Hopefully, we can expand the menu next year and make our presence more well-known.

### Do you need to have your staff mirror your diverse clientele?

We consider ourselves a representation of the communities in which we live, and that's what we hire. We hire good people. It's a simple business: good food and good people. ●