

Don Rabb moved to Charlotte from New Orleans in 1978. It was a big year for Charlotte — our airport was growing, the population surpassed 300,000 and Rabb jumped right into the city's growing food scene.

"A buddy of mine got an uncle to invest in a restaurant on Independence Boulevard called Shenanigans," Rabb told CharlotteFive. "We moved up here to help run the restaurant. It was right when you could first order liquor by the drink — people came to drink, but we couldn't give away the food."

Rabb learned the restaurant business at Shenanigans, which would serve him for a lifetime. More importantly, he met a bartender named Catherine. In 1984, less than a year after the two married, a restaurant on Providence Road in Myers Park hit the market. "We had talked about owning a restaurant one day," Rabb said. "So we put in a bid and waited."

Much to the couple's surprise, their bid was accepted, making them the new owners of Fenwick's, which had only opened six months prior.

"My wife was such a good cook at the time. That's the reason for our success," Rabb said. Catherine passed in 2021, yet her generous spirit and love of cooking remain at the core of Fenwick's. "If she had the ingredients, she would cook whatever customers wanted," Rabb said, his love and pride for the restaurant evident in every detail shared.

Fenwick's has been feeding Charlotte since 1984 Don Rabb and his wife, Catherine Rabb, who died in 2021, built the restaurant into a Myers Park staple, serving sandwiches, salads and more — plus fan favorite desserts like bread pudding with whiskey sauce.

At home in Myers Park

Rabb credits the restaurant's location to much of its success. "We know everyone in the neighborhood, and this is like a second home to many people," he said.

Over the years, several customers have become employees, including Bill Parker, who joined the staff nearly 15 years ago. "I moved to Charlotte from Boston in 1994," Parker said. "I came to Fenwick's with a friend and kept returning."

Fenwicks-06718.jpg Employee Bill Parker and owner Don Rabb of Fenwick's.

Parker struck up a friendship with Don and Catherine. Eventually, he volunteered to help with the books, which led to a job helping run payroll, human resources and doing other administrative tasks around the restaurant. Parker also brags on the neighbors. "We have a very loyal customer base in Myers Park and Eastover," he said.

Fenwick's is embedded in the larger Charlotte community, as well. For years, Catherine taught about wine, beverages and pairings at Johnson & Wales University. And the restaurant is a longtime participant of Soup on Sunday, an annual soup tasting fundraiser supporting Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region.

Catherine also wrote the "On Wine" column in The Charlotte Observer for many years.

Catherine Rabb_2010.JPG In 2022, the Soup on Sunday event honored the late chef Catherine Rabb of Fenwick's, one of the founding chefs of the event.

Homemade meals and time-tested recipes

Having grown up in New Orleans, it's no surprise that Rabb has sprinkled a little Cajun influence into Fenwick's. The restaurant offers red beans and rice and shrimp etouffee on Tuesdays, however Rabb insists

that Fenwick's is not a Cajun restaurant.

Rather, Fenwick's cuisine is based on Catherine's family recipes and dishes she invented from scratch. "We skipped the whole fast food thing — everything is homemade," Rabb said. "If you order a steak sandwich, you're getting the same cut of tenderloin as if you ordered a filet."

Fenwicks-06696.jpg Fenwick's Shrimp Remolaude Salad.

These days, Catherine's brother Andy knows all of her recipes and runs the kitchen. Among the restaurant's most popular dishes are chicken salad, its signature burger and the trout — grilled or cooked with lemon capers. The seafood is also popular, and Rabb claims the light batter sets Fenwick's fried oysters and shrimp apart from competitors.

"All of our desserts are homemade, too," Rabb said. The bread pudding with whiskey sauce and pecan cream pie are the two most popular desserts. "That bread pudding is a sugar rush," Parker said. "It's delicious."

Fenwicks-06753.jpg Fenwick's bread pudding with whiskey sauce.

As for the name? "The original owners named it Fenwick's, and my wife always joked that we didn't have the money to change the name," Rabb said.

And just like our conversation started with Catherine, it ended there, too — with fond memories of the woman who made Fenwick's into the special restaurant Charlotteans have loved for decades.

Fenwicks-08444.jpg The interior of Fenwick's Restaurant on Providence Road.

Fenwick's

Location: 511 Providence Rd, Charlotte, NC 28207

Neighborhood: Myers Park

Menu

Cuisine: American

Hours: Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.

To order: dine in or call 704-333-2750 for takeout.

Rana's freemium column

CITATION (APA STYLE)

Freeman, P. (2022, August 25). Fenwick's has served homemade dishes to regulars, newcomers alike for nearly 40 years. *Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC)*. Available from NewsBank: America's News – Historical and Current: <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.proxy141.nclive.org/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/18C1D913EB0B4D68>.

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