

# Business

## Luck of the dice boosts restaurateur into business

By SUZIE ROLLINS

Sydney Harris won his first bistro about 20 years ago in a craps game in Springfield, Ill.

From there to his latest venture, Sydney's in the Top of Troy skyscraper, it's an engaging story, very much like the host himself.

A handsome, gray-haired man of 45, Harris stops to chat with nearly all his customers in his new restaurant which replaces the Bonaventure Supper Club in the Big Beaver building.

The restaurant specializes in steaks and seafood. Harris is fond of saying he offers the best culinary mixture "this side of Joe Mue's."

Asked specifically when Lady Luck shed her bounty at the craps table, Harris refuses to be pinned down.

"Don't ask me to remember dates. I just can't do that," he said as he leaned back in his chair propping his feet on his desk.

"I was playing the Lake Club in Springfield and was in a gambling gang and I started playing dice with another guy and he tapped out. He owed me \$5,000 so I picked up an IOU for his restaurant (near Peoria)," he recalled.

"I ended up with a restaurant that was really worth \$50,000."

His luck began in Peoria, but it wasn't the restaurant business that boosted his income. His money-makers were the lemonade stands he operated at six state fairs. Although he picked up the stands as a sideline to his job of booking talent at the fairs, they turned out to be more profitable. He dropped talent management.

IN THE EARLY '50s, fresh out of Augusta Military Academy, the Grosse Pointe native joined the U.S. Air Force. Instead of donning a uniform and heading for Korea with the rest of the troops, he told his superiors he was a comedian. Even though he had never performed a comedy act, Harris was assigned to special services.

"They sent me to a couple of Air Force bases and I put shows on and refereed fights," he said. "I put together the Tops in Blue show for Ed Sullivan, with Steve Lawrence and the Army."

After his military stint and before entering the restaurant business, Harris performed at the now-defunct Riviera Club, on Grand River in Detroit.

His jokes took him to Springfield, where his luck won him the restaurant, launching a profitable show-biz career.

"I started producing convention shows in Peoria for the college students there," he said. "I did Shriner

shows and brought Buster Keaton there. I had a great time then."

"I was making a lot of money and wanted to start investing. I became involved with Charlie Hogan who owned Minsky's in New York and was a talent representative. He gave me the opportunity to represent Bob Hope and book him for personal appearances," Harris said. "I started getting Hope dates at colleges and made a fortune with him on college campuses and state fairs."

WITH SUCCESS calling, Harris sold the restaurant and concentrated on producing state fair shows, booking such talents as Tennessee Ernie Ford and Andy Williams for personal appearances.

But his adventures in show business were just beginning.

Ten years after getting into the state fair business, Harris packed up his money and moved to New York to invest in movies.

"I worked with a couple of other guys and we put together \$900,000 which we lost on a movie which was never released."

Harris moved to the Windy City 18 months later and decided to invest in restaurants in Chicago's chic Ar-Ar-Assador East and West hotels. That lasted "a short while" and six years ago, at 39, he sold out and "retired" to a 40-acre farm in Hilldale, Mich.

"We (he and Karen, his wife and business partner) bought a restaurant there and four tractors. We adopted

our daughter Jennifer. Then, about a year ago, decided to move back to Detroit."

THE MOVE WAS determined after Harris' wife told him he had to find something else to do all day other than buy tractors.

"It was an auction unit. I kept buying these tractors and she couldn't stand it. So she told me to buy a restaurant," he said. His search was aided by Martin Kregger, general manager for Machus Restaurants.

"He told me about three restaurants for sale and I really liked this one," he said.

Harris prides himself on his restaurant's cozy atmosphere, good food and pleasant service. During lunchtime he caters to the office-building tenants, offering them a chance to pre-order lunches.

"They can call up an order ahead of time and have lunch on the table when they get here."

For dinner, he hopes to attract the general public.

Harris ventured back to the Detroit area because he's always been a "Mid-west" guy who loves people, he said.

When asked what distinguishes Sydney's from the other restaurants in the area, he responds, "There's no class consciousness at Sydney's. I want this restaurant to be for everyone. I wear a sweater and make sure everyone is comfortable here and enjoying themselves. We care."



HARRIS: "I was playing the Lake Club in Springfield and was in a gambling game. I was shooting dice with another guy and he tapped out. He owed me \$5,000 so I picked up an IOU for his restaurant. I ended up with a restaurant that was really worth \$50,000." (Staff photo by John Stano)

## Economy's remedy: Cut spending

Reducing federal spending in 1980 could restore stability to the United States' economy.

That's the opinion of David Littmann, senior economist and vice president of Manufacturers National Bank of Detroit.

He adds that a repetition of the red ink of the '70s would threaten the foundations of the U.S. economy and those of other nations as well.

On the immediate future, Littmann predicts the current economic situation will ease into stagnation after the first half of 1980, noting that in Detroit the current economic situation began a downturn in the final quarter of 1979.

Some improvements in the economy in late 1980 could bring mortgage interest rates back down to "break the 12 percent level" by the end of this year, he predicts.

DESPIITE the Korean and Vietnam wars, gains in gross national product averaged 4 percent and inflation 2.5 percent in the 1950s and 1960s. But those figures deteriorated to 2.9 percent in the GNP and to 7 percent inflation in the '70s.

No surplus nor balanced federal budget occurred in the '70s "because of fiscal recklessness," he adds. Monetary observers generally agree that federal deficits pre-ordain inflation.

## Business Trends

# Builders' forecast: 'Poor, good, fair'

This outlook for 1980 was prepared by The Builders Exchange of Detroit and Michigan, a 2,360 company member construction association.

New residential construction will be "poor," commercial building "good" and industrial construction "fair."

That's the assessment of construction activity for southeastern Michigan in 1980 by the board of directors of The Builders Exchange.

David Powell, president of the association, said the expected residential construction downturn due to extremely high mortgage interest rates, and its resultant impact on construction activity, may be offset, from an overall construction industry standpoint, by a relatively strong showing of commercial construction in 1980.

Powell sees continued growth in the small commercial shopping center and professional plaza (medical, legal spe-

cial services space) categories.

"Both of these categories will continue at a good clip, especially in the southeastern Michigan area. One of the stronger areas for this type of construction is Livonia and its environs," he says.

Turning to the industrial construction category, the exchange maintains that, while there will be no significant rise in new industrial plant construction, company owners will continue to renovate or retrofit their existing plants in 1980.

THE EXCHANGE board also predicts there will be some "isolated strengths" in some industrial construction sectors, such as the automobile industry, where management is already committed to plant construction for the newer type automobiles.

Ben Capp of Wolverine Marble Co., one of the exchange's vice presidents,

notes that there is a definite trend on the part of those purchasing construction services for quality work. He says that despite slowing economic conditions, owners, especially in the commercial construction category, are willing to pay more for quality work.

"The ceramic tile trades are going strong and this strength is expected to carry over throughout 1980," he says.

The exchange board's 1980 construction outlook expressed an overall confidence in building activity in the new year. It says that "it's going to be tough for some construction categories, but construction, as a business, has always been tough and those construction contractors who heed economic conditions will survive the storm."

The exchange foresees several challenges facing southeastern Michigan's construction industry in 1980.

Construction wage negotiations will be a hot topic. The majority of building

## BUSINESS PEOPLE

Southfield radio station WXYZ's new ombudsman service, the Action Bureau for Consumers, is directed by JANE PRESCOTT. JOE MARTELLE has joined WXYZ Talkradio as assistant operation manager.

McLouth Steel Corp. named MICHAEL J. HIEMSTRA of Troy vice president-finance. Hiemstra joined McLouth in 1977.

KAREN M. STEWART of Southfield was promoted to public relations coordinator for the Michigan Credit Union League.



HIEMSTRA STEWART DANN BENSON

Two area men were named to governing positions with the American Automobile Association (AAA). President RICHARD B. DANN of Bloomfield Hills was re-elected chairman of AAA's special committee on official appointments. Dann has been chief executive for 15 years. CLIF FORD R. BENSON of Birmingham, general manager of the Auto Club's Insurance Group, was reappointed to AAA's insurance committee.

Smith, Hinchman & Grylls Associates Inc. promoted vice president HENRY J. GUTHARD to account executive on major building design projects and SHALISH B. YOBA to assistant director of the E & C division. Both men are Bloomfield Hills residents.

JIM DAWSON was elected vice president of Brewer Advertising Inc. He was formerly advertising manager of the Southfield Observer in 1970-71 when the paper was founded.

GAYLE CHEVILLET has joined the sales staff of Signals & Systems Inc. in Troy.

RICHARD A. BANFIELD was named director of manufacturing and JAMES C. BELLARIPA of Bloomfield Hills was named director of finance and business planning for Rockwell International's Truck Axle Division.

American Motors Corp. in Southfield appointed THOMAS J. FOLEY assistant corporate controller for financial operation.

JAMES H. BERLINE has joined Barkley & Evergreen of Detroit, Inc., in Southfield, as senior vice president-director of client services.



FOLEY BERLINE SHIFFERD O'MALLEY

WARREN D. SHIFFERD JR. of Troy was appointed to officer status as assistant cashier in the Detroit Bank & Trust Oakland County loan group.

CATHERINE O'MALLEY of Farmington Hills was appointed administrative assistant to the vice president at Dayton Hudson Properties in Southfield.

WILLIAM E. STEWART of Lathrup Village was appointed vice president marketing for J.A. Fredman Inc.

MARTIN H. CHESLER of West Bloomfield was named Detroit district sales manager for Cardiac Pacemakers, Inc.

Former Avon Township resident PATRICK DILLON has been named manufacturing and general administrative manager for the control products operation of the instrument and control division at Rexnord Inc. New Berlin, Wis.

RICHARD S. VIDA was appointed regional leasing representative for Dayton Hudson Properties in Southfield.

MARK MILLER of Birmingham was appointed Detroit regional sales manager for Woman's Day. He has also been the national marketing manager for Peterson Publication, and most recently affiliated with Screen Vision as Detroit manager.

MICHAEL COLUCCI of West Bloomfield has been named to the new position of director of marketing at Providence Hospital, Southfield.

JAMES W. HELMIRICH of Bloomfield Hills has been named Michigan Bell's community relations manager for the Birmingham-Pontiac area. Helmrich succeeds Charles B. Woodhead of Rochester who is retired after 41 years with Michigan Bell.

## market place

PERSONAL income increased in all states except Michigan and South Dakota in the second quarter (April, May and June) of 1979, according to U.S. Department of Commerce statistics. Personal income in the United States increased 2.2 percent. Real personal income in the U.S. was virtually unchanged in the second quarter as consumer prices increased 2.2 percent (unadjusted for inflation). In 23 states and the District of Columbia, the increase in current-dollar personal income equaled or exceeded the national increase in consumer prices. In 29 states, the increase in current dollar personal income was less than the national increase in consumer prices.

STANDARD Federal Savings, one of the nation's largest savings and loan associations, opened its 49th Michigan branch office at 6120 Maple in West Bloomfield. The office is temporarily located at Maple and Farmington roads while the permanent office is built. John Pittwood will be the manager.

THE PRESIDENT of American Motors Corp., W. Paul Tippett, will be the speaker at the Detroit Chapter of the American Society's annual management meeting tonight at Vladimirs in Farmington Hills, to honor key managers in the foundry and related industry. For more details, call Denny Cole at 569-2501. The chapter is the second largest in the nation.

SOUTHFIELD based Earl Keim Realty set a company record in the sale of used homes with an 18.3 percent increase over last year with \$410.7 million. The organization sold 8,578 houses in 1979 through its 83 offices in Michigan. The firm plans to have 120 offices by the end of 1980.

AMERICAN Federal Savings opened its 17th branch office in Suite 110, 4000 Prudential Town Center. The 1,000-square-foot facility will be managed by Beatrice Kropf, formerly of AFS's Orchard Lake and Livernois offices.

TWELVE metropolitan Detroit banks will underwrite a money management program for two years offered to the public under the coordination of Credit Counseling Centers Inc. of Southfield. The non-profit financial counseling agency has received more than 400 requests for money management education programs in the past two years. Beginning in February, a graduate credit consumer economics course will be offered for Detroit teachers co-sponsored with Eastern Michigan University. Additional programs include seminars for bank employees and creditors focusing on family financial needs and the crises related to indebtedness. Presentations to social service agencies, clergy and community educators will be made on topics such as consumer credit, money management, budgeting and what to do when you can't pay your bills. Banks participating are National Bank of Detroit, Detroit, Bank Corp., Manufacturers National Corp., Dearborn Bank and Trust Co., Bank of the Commonwealth, First Independence National Bank of Detroit, Bank of Commerce, National Bank of Dearborn, Wayne Bank, Liberty State Bank and Trust, Security Bank and Trust Co. and City National Bank. For more details on the program, contact Marilyn Gunther at Credit Counseling Centers, 557-7502.

AUTOWEEK, a national weekly consumer publication, will move its editorial department from Reno, Nevada, to Detroit. The paper is published by Crain Consumer Group, a subsidiary of Crain Communications Inc. Its sister publication, Automotive News, an industry trade publication, also is based in Detroit.

BUSINESSES wishing to submit items for Marketplace should send them to Ron Garbinski, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 1225 Bowers, Birmingham 48012. Notices of meetings must be received by the Monday preceding our Thursday publication date. Please include a contact person and telephone number.