

They're Not Crazy After All

By Dr. Edward J. Mullins
ALL PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR



The Henningsens, (L to R): Carsten, Sr., daughter-in-law Betsy, wife Joyce, and son Carsten, Jr.

An overflow crowd of well-wishers filled Ye Olde Pizza Joynt in Hayward, California, to capacity for the Henningsens' 30th Anniversary party November 29. Emcee Bill Langford entertained with his console artistry at the 3/13 Wurlitzer and reminisced about his eighteen years there. Langford introduced Joyce and Carsten Henningsen's son, Carsten, Jr., who had the following to say:

"Thank you all for coming here tonight. Some of you know me as 'Little Carsten;' it's a big distinction. This is quite a celebration; it's a very special time for my parents and myself. As you heard Bill speak, it's really a family. You look over on the door, you seen Henningsen Family. That really means all of you. It really is a family.

"Every time you walk in here you feel there's a sense of family here. That's the most important thing that I think my parents have been able to accomplish.

"So, we're celebrating tonight. We're celebrating success, and there are a lot of ways to measure success in the world today. I think that my parents can measure success today, thirty years later, by looking back and seeing all the joy, the happiness and the great pizza (Applause) that they've brought.



Carsten Henningsen, left, with Bob Denny who installed Wurlitzer organ in Ye Olde Pizza Joynt in 1963.

"Bill Langford mentioned that my Dad started out as an Industrial Engineer and one day he decided, well, hey, pizza sounds like a good idea, so let's start a pizza restaurant. The strange thing about that is that neither my Mom nor my Dad had ever made a pizza in their life before, and then came up with the idea, and just launched right into it. And then that's kind of a nice thing too, to look back at and look at the success story, a true American entrepreneurial spirit at work.

"Somebody thought it was pretty crazy to jump into this whole affair and not have any experience at all in the restaurant business or in the pizza business. And then at the time he decided to take a theatre pipe organ and put it inside a restaurant, you have to imagine what people thought, especially our relatives. In fact none of our relatives spoke to us at all for about five or six years. (Laughter) Because, truly now when you think back, that was an incredibly insane, ridiculous and crazy idea. But the craziness worked.

"I'd like to bring my Mom and Dad up here right now. (Prolonged applause). Well, they're not crazy after all, as you can see thirty years later, and over a billion pizzas later. I think about a million-and-a-half pizzas. We're playing around with the calculator. So, they definitely are not crazy. The rest is history.

"We'd like to present you tonight with this plaque here that will, kind of, capture the memories of tonight. Something you



Organists Jerry Nagano, left, and Bill Langford entertained at the 30th Anniversary Party.

can hang on the wall and remember forever. Thank you for all the years. Thank you for thirty wonderful years. (Applause)

"I just want to leave you with one more small story. On the day that I was born, this is kind of a unique experience I think for myself. (Laughter) Actually, I should tell you that my parents have conceived some very good ideas over the last thirty years. But anyway, the first day, the day I was born, the first home I saw, the first place they stopped after the hospital was the Pizza Joynt, believe it or not. It's a true story. Apparently they had to come to clean up, or whatever, to get things fixed for the evening. They put a couple of pizza tables together and that was my first crib. That's a true story. There are the same tables by the way.

"So, once again the theme here is family. The Pizza Joynt has been a family to us all. I know all of you sense that spirit, and there are a lot of special people here tonight who are part of that family.

"I'd like to give some recognition tonight to a very, very important group of people who have been at the center of this family, and that's the Pizza Joynt crew. The folks that have been making the pizza and pouring the beer and keeping things going here and keeping that magic spirit in order for a long, long time. I'd like to call up a few representatives of that Pizza Joynt crew so you can meet just a few of them who have been here a long, long time.

"Could we get Robert, Ray and Mike. (Applause) This crew has been exceptional over the years, as you know. I just want to let you in on something. Last week they made more pizzas than we have here in about seven years. So, in other words, things are still going strong. We're still breaking records. Come on up Robert, Mike, Ray. I want to mention that these fellows, right here, Robert Spengler has been here since 1971; Mike McNeilly started here in 1969; Ray Watkins has been here since 1971 as well.

"So, that's the family feeling we all share here. To prove it's a special night I'd like to have all of you join us in a special song of the evening, the 'Happy Birthday' song to help celebrate thirty years tonight. Come on Bill and help us at the keyboard to sing 'Happy Birthday' to the Pizza Joynt's thirty years."

Bill Langford sat on the bench and exclaimed, "Here's the cake!" as a lighted birthday cake, candles ablaze was paraded out and presented to Joyce and Carsten. Bill played a rousing "Happy Birthday" on the Wurlitzer. By this time the throng had swelled further. Partygoers were treated to champagne, and a delicious mocha-flavored whipped cream cake was devoured.

Newly appointed resident organist, Jerry Nagano, then took his turn at the organ. It was a delightful theatre organ event that will be remembered by all who attended. Thanks a million to the Henningsen Family for another wonderful time.