

The History of Chiocca's Park Avenue Inn

The building that we all know affectionately as Chiocca's Park Avenue Inn was erected in 1908. In fact, the buildings in the entire 400 block of Meadow Street were constructed that year.

It is believed that the building initially served as a drug store. By the 1930s, it was rental property that was held in a trust and operated as a confectionary run by H. V. Funai. Ironically, Mr. Funai was the son of the former business partner of Frank Chiocca's father who operated a restaurant at 327 East Franklin Street.

In 1934, Mr. Reuben Vranian took over 2001 Park Avenue and ran a confectionary type of business for 30 years. In 1964 Mr. Vranian retired. The man who took over the business was Frank A. Chiocca.

Frank opened for business on June 18, 1964. His rent was \$105 per month. In 1982, Frank and his wife, Betty Chiocca, bought the property.

For over 40 years Frank dispensed food, drink, good times and friendship to those of us lucky enough to be part of what Frank called "a good run". On November 29, 2004, the run ended, but the memories will last forever.

Thanks Frank . . . for the memories.

Your Former Patrons and Friends

Notes from Frank's Friends

Frank, I sure hate to see a good thing come to an end. "Din" and I came down for lunch the very week you closed – wish we had come sooner. I'm going to be out-of-town but I'll be thinking about you. Carter will be there "in spirit". I've always said he probably wouldn't have married me if I hadn't like beer and baseball.

- Luck to ya, XXX Margaret

Dear Frank, as you know, you'll be missed! Aside from the everyday visits Bim made, I've been missing my occasional drop-ins!

My best to you and Betty,

- Brownie

Enjoy your retirement, you earned it! It was a long way from Saipan to Park Avenue! Ooo Rah!

- Charlie Blackwell

Reggie and I moved to Richmond in 1987 and ventured to Frank's a few weeks after we got settled in. We met the regulars and, of course, Frank that day/evening and were "adopted" immediately as a part of the regulars. Thank you for your friendship, Frank, and providing a lot of memories for 17+ years!

- Ann Marie & Reggie

I have really enjoyed all of the Friday nights I have spent with you at "the pond". Best wishes for a long and a happy retirement.

- Bob Bain

Back in 1974 when I first had the pleasure of entering the hallowed doors of *Chiocca's* Park Avenue Inn, I was called "son" by the proprietor. From that day on I knew I was a member of "the Park Avenue Inn family". The highlight of my week for over three decades was Friday night at Frank's. Three Coins, at least one cold beer (not to mention a few warm ones), my favorite chicken sandwich and conversations that were always entertaining . . . and sometimes containing an ounce of verity.

In my early years I always found it odd that "the regulars" always stood while lesser mortals had the comfort of sitting. Then I soon came to realize that they had to stand in order to keep their heads above all the bulls _ _ _ that was mounting around them.

Prior to having gained a foothold at the "big table" so that members of the Fraternal Order of Fish (FOOF) could conduct their gaming activities, Frank graciously allowed our fledgling social club to celebrate its o-fish-al founder's night at his fine establishment on October 31, 1983. He even let us hang our charter at a prominent place on the wall. For over two decades, the Bench consistently dominated the Chairs using sometimes bold, but *always* logical, calls winning more dollars than could ever be spent at The Inn. As the years passed, the Fish found additional wall space for awards of recognition of our social friends, which Frank graciously and generously allowed us to occupy. Not unlike Pee Wee's playhouse, Frank's place was "our place".

A part of my life must now be put on the shelf along with all those dusty cans of Campbell's tomato soup. The building remains, but the heart is gone. Thanks so very much for the hospitality, the service, the fun, the memories, countless beers, and most importantly, the friendship for what I consider the best years of my life.

Hey, Frank, got any white meat? . . . yes, that's correct, no glass . . . and keep the change.
- Al Dorin

Frank, in 1975 remember my menu, tomato soup and ice cream with chocolate syrup. Best wishes in retirement.

- Ga Ga

Frank, it has been a pleasure over all these years to pop into the "little store" and have a cool one, or two, etc. I could always count on seeing the many characters of Richmond who would frequent your establishment. Also, it has been a lot of fun to be on the committee that put your retirement party together. Have a great retirement, and I look forward to seeing you in the future!

- Pat Morris

I was always enthralled by the quiet, calm demeanor of Frank in the midst of Friday night revelers! I was a big fan of the way another beer was ordered – a holler and a wave of the bottle. It may not have been the coldest beer in town, but it was delivered by a master. I will miss the people, the place, and mostly seeing Frank behind the bar.

- Rin Barkdull

Thanks for including us in Frank's retirement. I once told him that his place was as close to heaven as I will ever get. I really mean that. I hate to say goodbye. I got this goodbye expression from an old Richmond boy by the name of Tommy Bruce. He was in the insurance business. When it came time to leave, I would shake Frank's hand and look him in the eyes and say, "Frank don't let your meat loaf". He would smile and say, "don't worry about that". Sorry we can't be there physically, but we are there in spirit.

- Nina & Jack Carter

Frank's was like a home away from home and not very far away at that! For those of us who were regulars, the Park Avenue Inn was a meeting place for friends – the "nerve center" as it was called. We could catch up on the comings and goings of the patrons, or we could watch a game of TV, or we could discuss events of the world. There would always be someone there you knew, and on the rare occasions when Frank was by himself we looked forward to having a beer with the "proprietor". The Park Avenue Inn was truly a unique place. We thank Frank for being a great "host" and for his friendship for all these years. We really miss him at 2001 Park.

- Sherry & Sandy

"Hey Frank! Should I have the "special" or the club today . . . or two clubs!" Thanks for all the wonderful, fun, great times with at "The Inn". You are truly one of the finest people I have ever met – best wishes always!

P.S. Will you come over one day, make a "club" and we can play Neil Diamond music with Nancy Muldowney.

- Brenda McSweeney

I am really going to miss Frank and his kind, gentle manner. Great devil eggs are history. A sad occasion for his customers but a well earned retirement for him. God Bless you Frank.

- Stukie Valentine

Frank, congratulations on your well deserved retirement! Your hospitality, warm smile and engaging banter are outstanding traits that have endeared you to all your patrons and friends.

I remember when I returned to the United States from Vietnam in 1968, the first place I stopped was Chiocca's Park Avenue Inn. You greeted me warmly and, after a cold beer and one of your great homemade sandwiches I truly felt I was home again!

I fondly remember the numerous visits (pilgrimages) that Jack Carter, Buck Hart, Jim Hunsucker, Mac McDonald and I made from Williamsburg over the years to spend some time telling tribal stories in your great establishment. You would say "I see they let you boys off the reservation today" when we came in. Ben McCary usually joined us as we hoisted a few and had great fun.

I want to join your legion of fans and friends in wishing you the very best in health and happiness in the future. You have enriched all our lives. For that, I say simply thank you!

- Bill "Curly/Curls" Ketron

Chiocca's Park Avenue Inn has been the "Cheers" of Richmond long before "Cheers" came about. I have always said it (is) was the finest gentlemen's bar in the city mainly because it was owned and operated by a true gentleman in every sense of the word. Frank, you are the best.

- Rick Kastleberg

Congratulations, Frank, on your retirement. It was a run reminiscent of the Hopes and the Crosbys, so "thanks for the memories!" Where I will ever find a Chiocca's special sandwich again is known but to God. But that is not as important as you and Betty having the best years of your lives ahead of you. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! for providing a real one-of-a-kind place stored with good food, cold refreshments, and countless memories for its patrons. May the God of peace and love delight to dwell with and bless you.

- George Latham

Memories of Dad and Park Avenue Inn

I practically grew up there. For five consecutive years I worked there getting "the education of a lifetime". It all seems short-lived now.

One vivid memory I have is of a local "homeless" character that was frequenting the Inn for a time. When he came in during a busy lunch, the place buzzing full of customers, Dad would react with his familiar "Oh me, oh me" lament, nervously shaking his head. Dad would occasionally give these hungry "down and outs" a lunch bag to take with them. On one particularly busy day Dad reached in and grabbed the remains of a ham hock, bone and all, stuffed it in bag and handed it to the poor chap in hopes he would make a quick exit. Well, lo and behold, the fellow sat right down at a table, pulled out the ham hock and started chewing away, much to Dad's dismay. He was quickly escorted out the door.

So many people that have passed through the doors of Chiocca's Park Ave., each with their own unique story, reminding me of one of my favorite "Frank-ism's", "You don't have to be crazy to come in here but it helps!"

- Vickie Chiocca

Frank: I miss the cheery whistle and the staccato rhythm of your knife. Best wishes to you and Betty.

- Sincerely, Jim DeJarnette

We both had addresses on Park Avenue. I was at 1601 and Frank at 2001. Frank made his friends "happy" and then I made them "well". Enjoy your retirement years in good health.

- Richard Hoffarth
Stuart Circle Pharmacy

Where else can you get so much for so little? . . . I've been searching for the answer. Where else, but the "Bank of Frank", every Friday.

- The Kingfish

I've loved two Franks for most of my days
Cherished each in different ways
Sinatra for his cool melodious songs
Chiocca for his sexy leopard skin thong.

He was slinging subs at his father's place
I enjoyed a beer and his friendly face
It's been sixty years since we first met
Some nights we remember some we forget.

With Bunny and Bill Drinkmore on our weekly lark
Many laughs and great times at Meadow and Park
With Betty at his side they were my favorite host
I thank you Frank, I think you're the most.

- Nancy Davey (via her son Bart Davey)

Frank, I want to wish you the most happy retirement years ahead. It would almost be impossible for me to single out the many wonderful things that happened to the gang from Williamsburg when we came to the Park Avenue Inn.

One of the most memorable was when "Deep Pockets" Hunsucker bought everyone a round. Like dominos, four of us fell to the floor in shock!

I am sorry I cannot attend your celebration dinner. PF "Pure Filth" Carter joins me and many other constituents from Williamsburg in wishing you and your family many years of well-deserved rest and leisure.

- "Skip" McDonald

Dear Frank,

Our 19 years in the City would have been very different without you and The Inn, and not nearly as much fun!!

Thank you for your hospitality and patience with us through the years. What on earth are folks doing on Friday nights now?

We hope that you and Betty will enjoy your retirement and do some of the things you never had time for!

- With love and best wishes,
Jim and Rosaline Wilson