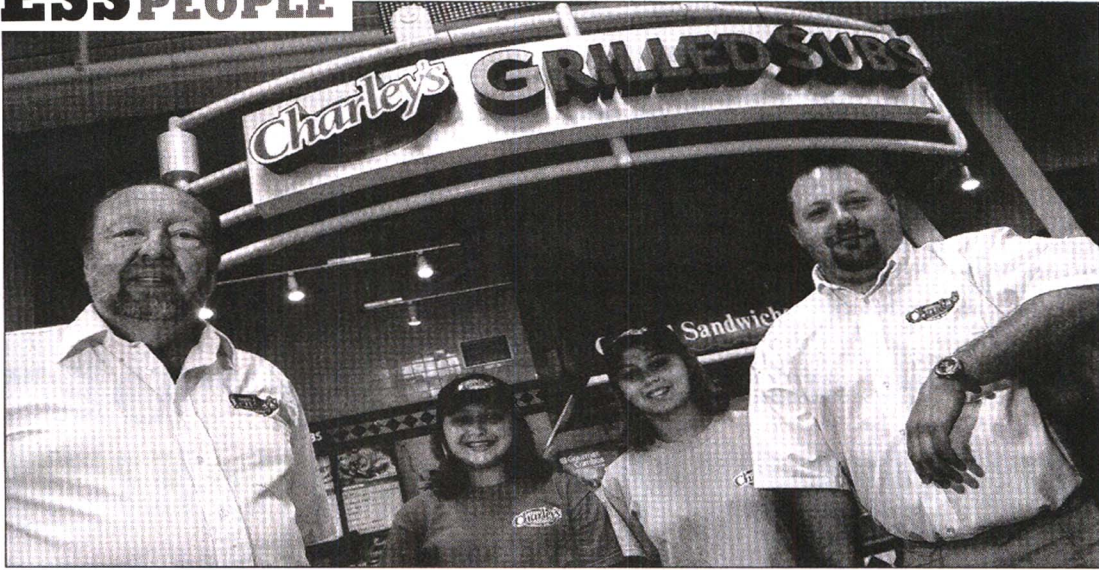


GREEN BAY PRESS-GAZETTE

BUSINESS PEOPLE

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Charley's Grilled Subs owner Ken Schermitzler, son, Rob, and Rob's daughters Briana, left, and Britny, at the Bay Park Square mall food court in Ashwaubenon. H. Marc Larson/Press-Gazette

Charley's owner strives to be a 'destination'

Store opened in '95 as company's 33rd franchise

By Richard Ryman
Green Bay Press-Gazette

The Green Bay Press-Gazette talks to business owners in its Monday conversation feature. Today, Ken Schermitzler talks about his 15 years as owner of Charley's Grilled Subs in Bay Park Square mall in Ashwaubenon, where he was one of the first food court tenants.

Q. Why did you decide on Charley's Grilled Subs, and why locate in the mall? How long have you been there?

A. I had worked in IT for 25 years in the banking and market research industries.

In 1994, the company I was with decided to downsize in this area and move the majority of its operations to the Chicago area. After several months of visiting various communities in Illinois looking at housing, I decided to start a business in this area. I researched many franchises and narrowed it down to a couple that did not have outlets here in Green Bay. After visiting the corporate headquarters for Charley's and sampling some of their great sandwiches, I

CHARLEY'S GRILLED SUBS

» **Owners:** Ken Schermitzler and Rob Schermitzler

» **Address:** Bay Park Square mall food court, Ashwaubenon

» **Hours:** 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. (or mall hours)

» **Phone:** (920) 498-3069

» **Website:** www.charleysgreenbay.com

decided to join them as their 33rd franchise. I opened my store in 1995, and there are now more than 430 locations around the world.

While looking for a location, I learned that Bay Park Square would be removing the movie theaters and transforming that space into a food court. Since Charley's was a hit in several Simon malls already, I thought that would be a great location.

Q. You have some employees who've been with you for many years. How do you retain good employees?

A. My philosophy has always been, "Take care of your employees and they will take care of you and your busi-

ness." I treat my employees fairly, and encourage them to succeed. Many that I hired while they were in high school went on to college and returned during their semester breaks and summer vacations. We offer a scholarship program, and reward service anniversaries with bonus checks. I also have an SEP retirement fund that employees can contribute to with some matching funds from my company. We have an annual party in January with prizes auctioned off for "Charley Bucks" that employees earn for various performance targets.

Q. Do you separate family and business, or do you find that is not an issue? What are the keys to a successful family-run business?

A. My oldest son Rob is now a 50-50 partner in the business. We depend on each other to continually promote the business and keep all employees focused on great customer service. Rob's daughters are now crewmembers, but are treated no differently than our other employees. We try to treat everyone like family, so

no special treatment is necessary.

Q. Is there a difference working in a mall setting compared with a stand-alone restaurant?

A. Although there is a certain amount of dependence on the mall's ability to draw in customers, it is extremely important to market ourselves as a destination, not just a place to eat if you happen to be in the mall. Our customer base includes many people who come in to the mall just to go to Charley's. This is why I'm proud to offer the only authentic Philly cheesesteaks in the Green Bay area. When people want a real Philadelphia-style steak sandwich, we're the ones to visit.

Q. Do you have a succession plan? Will Charley's continue to be family run?

A. I expect Rob to continue running the operation after I retire, and some day perhaps one or both of his daughters will become owners. I have some great long-term employees who I feel are "family," so maybe one or more of them will eventually want to continue as an owner.