

Village Inn sold after 22 years in the family

Elmer's Texas BBQ owners step in for Carlson's April 1

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Jerry's Village Inn in Ottertail will be under new owners – April Fool's Day.

But the change at one of the Otter Tail lake country's longest running family owned restaurants is no April Fool's joke.

Elaine Carlson has sold the business that the family owned-operated for 22 years. Jerry Carlson, the namesake for the establishment, died five years ago. But wife Elaine and son John continued to run the operation, which evolved into an unusually popular stop for both year-round residents and summer residents and visitors.

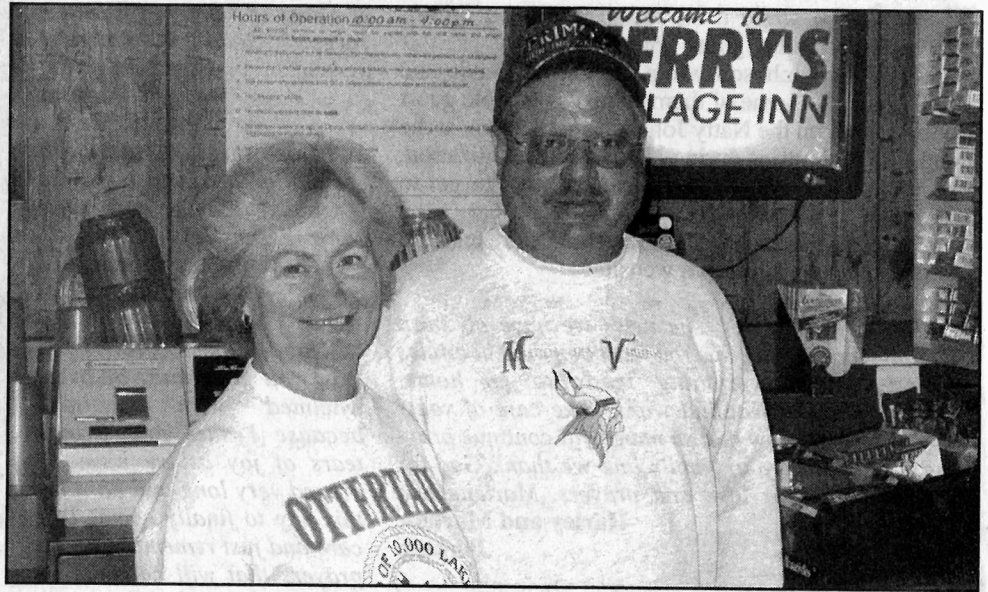
"It's time to retire, get my house in order...make my own coffee in the morning at home – rather than here," laughed Elaine. Jerry's operated seven days a week, 365 days a year – even Christmas evening. "I think my coffee pot at home still works."

Purchasing Jerry's and taking over April 1 are Tim and Ursula Nansen, owners of Elmer's Texas BBQ. They plan to operate both restaurants.

Jerry and Elaine, who were regular summer visitors to their cabin on West Leaf Lake, moved to Ottertail from their Twin Cities home in 1982. Their experience in the food-beverage business stemmed from Jerry, who managed the American Legion Post 350 club in Bloomington.

It became a genuine family business, with daughter Jeanne and son John, and their youngest Janine all pitching in at the Village Inn. John continued with the business for most of those 22 years.

Jerry's has employed hundreds of folks, most of them local, over the years. There were generally at least 20 full and part time employees, with at least 25 in the summers, said Elaine.



Jerry's Village Inn has been a family supper club, bar and off-sale liquor operation for 22 years in Ottertail. Elaine, above, and the late Jerry Carlson, built the business into one of the favorite Otter Tail lake country stops for locals and visitors. Son John, pictured here, has been an active part of the business for nearly all of those 22 years.

After the Carlsons' first five years, tragedy in the form of flames struck the business. They had just begun remodeling when a fire destroyed the building.

The fire was in June, meaning the Carlsons' lost substantial business during the crucial summer months.

Fortunately, they were able to locate their off-sale retail liquor operation in a garage down the road, recalled Elaine, which helped them maintain some cash flow during the summer.

In planning their next step after the fire, Jerry came home one day and announced that they were going to buy a bar in

Bluffton. Elaine was not excited – she really hadn't planned on completely relocating. But Jerry quickly responded: "No, we're buying the building – and we're going to move it to Ottertail."

By the following summer, the operation was completely up and running – as it has ever since.

"I have no regrets, none whatsoever," said Elaine, stating how much she has enjoyed the Village Inn. "I'm really going to miss all our customers and employees, they have been wonderful... But, I'm still going to be around," she added.