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PRESERVING NOSTALGIA

Leland's Bluebird Restaurant Embarks on Next Chapter

Leland, Michigan – Great food and hospitality bring people together.

According to Elliott Shore and Katie Rawson, authors of *Dining Out: A Global History of Restaurants*, the first restaurants evolved around 1100 AD in China, located in lively entertainment districts that catered to travelers. Restaurants grew quickly around the world – becoming communal spots for patrons to enjoy food, wine and one another.

Nearly a thousand years later, gathering around a table for a meal remains purposeful and spontaneous all at once – with the simple goodness of well-prepared food sparking traditions, friendships and sharing of ideas and culture. The stuff communities are made of.

At a time when time-worn traditions seem to be slipping from our grasp, one family has made sure that their 97-year-old tradition of great food and hospitality marches on.

Thankfully, it's a new chapter for one of Michigan's iconic and nostalgic destinations – the [Bluebird Restaurant and Tavern](#) in Leland, a few steps away from Historic Fishtown – where Martin Telgard, a boat builder, and wife Leone opened the Bluebird as a sandwich and soda shop in 1927.

Under the enduring watch of Third Generation Telgard's since 1996, owners Lynn and Skip, the Bluebird is being retooled and re-imagined. Lovers of its wonderous whitefish can relax, much to the relief of thousands who have dined there for decades as well as for those who will discover the joy and tradition of the Bluebird experience.

"We have customers that have been coming to the Bluebird for 30, 40, even 50 years," says Lynn. "Our extended family includes Village residents and visitors worldwide. This is about the sustainability of the restaurant and relationships – preserving and protecting what has been enjoyed for generations. We will become a smaller, leaner and more efficient Bluebird but one with more opportunities outdoors to dine, enjoy music and a fun variety of entertainment, including the gentle sounds of nature along the river."

Like the Bluebird, Leland's heritage is also rich, once the oldest and largest Ottawa villages on the Leelanau Peninsula. Antoine Manseau built a dam and sawmill on the river in 1854, raising it by 12 feet, creating Lake

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Leelanau. Leland’s Historic Fishtown, on the National Register of Historic Places since 1975, is one of few remaining fishing villages complete with weathered docks, a smokehouse, fish tugs, shanties and drying fishing nets plus fishing boats for charters searching for Lake Trout, Salmon, Steelhead Trout and more, sometimes in the shadow of the Manitou Islands.

With capital from [State Savings Bank](#) and “gap financing” from [Cherryland Electric Cooperative](#) and [Venture North Funding and Development](#), the Telgards will renovate the Bluebird property, including demolishing the current building that seats 300 and replacing it with a smaller restaurant closer to the Leland River and building a large outdoor patio with seating for 100+. This new building, designed by Lynn and Skip’s son-in-law, Michael Leaveck of [LTD Architects](#), will not only house the new Bluebird, but will be home to two new retail spaces of approximately 650 sq. ft. each.



“We are grateful to Venture North and Cherryland Electric,” says Skip. “They were able to close the gap in financing with our primary lender, State Savings Bank, making the whole project possible. We’ll be looking for Laura Galbraith and Rachel Johnson, leaders of the two organizations, to join us at a soft opening later this fall. One thing’s for sure – whitefish will remain as a centerplate feature!”

“This was the perfect way for Cherryland Electric Cooperative to use our annual small business loan fund,” said Cherryland CEO Rachel Johnson. “It’s a wonderful family and a great project for the community and the thousands who have come to know the Bluebird as an old friend. I can’t wait to go!”

“The significance of the project to the community and a huge number of customers is humbling and a source of great pride,” Lynn said. “All too often we see redevelopment trumping tradition and sentiment. Rest assured, we will retain the best of the best for all to enjoy, including our children who will be assuming management of the operation.”

Son Derek Telgard has returned to Leland after founding a highly successful restaurant in Knoxville featuring specialty pizza. Daughter Carolyn and architect husband Michael, both grads of the University of Michigan and UCLA, now reside in Leland and will bring their expertise and interest in operations and finance to the renovated Bluebird.

“What could be better,” the Telgard’s reflect. “We can see our kids and grandkids on the same day and watch our heritage being preserved for the good of community and our customers. It’s all about bringing people together.”