

CLIENT PROFILE: BROWN SUGAR



In 1977, Brown Sugar Restaurant with a seating capacity of 30 was established by Mr. Martin Donowa who had the vision of a Caribbean-style restaurant focused on serving patrons quickly based on the buffet-style traditionally the preserve of hotels. The restaurant is situated at Aquatic Gap, Bay Street, St. Michael, which makes it easily accessible to customers. In a quaint tropical setting, Brown Sugar offers *The Planter's Buffet*, a four-course feast of Barbadian and Caribbean food at lunchtime while providing an à la carte dining experience in the evening. Several specialties are on the menu but the Bajan Bread Pudding and two signature drinks, Bubbling Brown Sugar and Brown Sugar Seducer, are favourites among the patrons.

Special events such as birthday parties, business functions and wedding receptions may be arranged on request for patrons who crave the ambience and professional service of the restaurant. The property has also become a popular destination for delicious food on festive occasions like Mother's Day, Father's Day, Easter

Sunday and Christmas. It is therefore no surprise that Brown Sugar is frequented by locals and visitors alike for social, family and professional occasions.

The slogan the *Home of Bajan Cuisine* has not been easy to maintain as the business has experienced its share of challenges. The untimely death of its founder in 1981 forced the business to be temporarily realigned and overseen by close family members until Mr. Nicholas Donowa and Mrs. Marcelle Donowa-

Finance from EGFL assisted with the reconstruction and installation of energy efficient equipment after the fire in 2004

Cooke, two of Mr. Martin Donowa's children, took over the management role in 1996. Mrs. Marcelle Donowa-Cooke was subsequently appointed as general manager while Nicholas pursued alternative business opportunities. With a rejuvenated and dynamic management vision, operations notably improved over the period.

The owners were confronted with a major disaster when the building was destroyed by fire in October 2004. It was at this point that EGFL was able to assist the shareholders by providing the necessary finance for the reconstruction, modernization and expansion of the restaurant. In rebuilding the facility, management embraced the opportunity to enhance efficiency through water conservation measures, modernized electrical systems, and energy-efficient equipment, while simultaneously expanding seating capacity to accommodate growing customer demand.

Full scale operations resumed in December 2005 and the restaurant was once again patronized by loyal customers, many of whom steadfastly encouraged the owners throughout the ordeal. Like many of its counterparts, Brown Sugar had



to contend with the negative economic impacts of 9/11 and the 2008/2009 global financial crisis when business activity notably plummeted. In particular, 9/11 was the first time in its operating history that the restaurant was empty for three consecutive days. This was exacerbated by the sad passing of the experienced and passionate general manager Mrs. Marcelle Donowa-Cooke in December 2011. This unforeseen loss tested the family business' resolve, but Brown Sugar was like a phoenix rising from the ashes because Mr. Andre Donowa, also Martin's son, "stepped up to the plate" to manage the affairs with fervent and prudent plans to improve viability in a highly competitive environment. Management concentrated on devising new and creative ways to manage the business while selling an "experience" to its customers, not just food and beverages.

Despite the myriad problems faced by this iconic restaurant, maintaining "AAA approved Diamond Ratings achieved in 2009, 2011, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 and the unending word of mouth praise passed on for 40 years," remain central to Brown Sugar. Service excellence is achieved with the help of the unstinting dedication of the hard-working management and staff who have stayed with the Donowa team. In this regard, Ms. Gwen Cummins, the operations manager, Ms. Arlene Bushell, the dining room manager, and Ms. Madelyn Foster, the executive chef, have all worked at the restaurant for over 40 years alongside the Donowa family as part of the amazing journey called Brown Sugar. One may say that the food and

beverages served at Brown Sugar are true representations of Barbadian culinary heritage and the owners of this award-winning restaurant maintain consistency in presentation and taste while adding variety to the menu. Management challenges its clientele to: *"Ask a Barbadian where you can find the very best in Barbadian and Caribbean cuisine, and the answer is sure to be Brown Sugar Restaurant."*

Management strives to maintain the high standards to which their patrons have grown accustomed. There is a sharp focus on exploring and implementing new technologies such as renewable energy and waste management techniques. Management also keeps abreast of best practices and institutes cost-cutting measures geared towards improving operational efficiencies and sustainability in an ever demanding business environment. The mission to offer guests consistently high quality cuisine with indigenously infused flavours while supporting the domestic economy means that much of Brown Sugar's produce is procured locally when feasible. "We are also trying to be aware of social trends. We have gluten-free Fridays where everything on the menu is gluten-free," Nicholas said. "Our decisions aren't made based on profit only. We're also concerned with health and providing healthy options; we have several vegan options on our menu." This exemplifies management's belief that there is something to satisfy every palate at Brown Sugar.

AAA approved Diamond ratings and 'word of mouth' praise are evidence of international and local appreciation of the cuisine

Brown Sugar Restaurant has been forced to make tough decisions over the years and no less so in the current economic climate. Underlying these challenges is the acknowledgement of the real threat of competition. Nonetheless, Brown Sugar remains in business and management recognizes that they received assistance along the way from EGFL who was responsive in providing financing and adding value through timely business advice.

CREDITS: PREVIOUS INTERVIEW WITH BROWN SUGAR NATION PUBLISHING FEATURE DATED MARCH 16, 2018

