

# DINEAmerica

## About Us

DineAmerica has a long and rich history having evolved over many years into the successful program you see today. The initial concept was similar to coupon books that have been around for years in hundreds of different formats but with a few interesting differences.

The first program that influenced DineAmerica was called International League of Diners with home offices in the Quad Cities area. Differences between it and coupon books included the Restaurant Directory, a membership card and a mystery shopping program.

The Restaurant Directory contained valuable information about each restaurant including a sample menu. It was a very popular guide for diners who liked trying new restaurants but wanted to know a little about them first, and was better advertising for the restaurants than a simple coupon.

The membership card was a plastic numbered card. Each restaurant was assigned a number and when the diner showed the card to receive the discount the restaurant punched out their number so the diner couldn't receive the discount again. Unfortunately there were frequent problems with the wrong number being punched as well as lost cards.

The mystery shopping program gave restaurants valuable feedback about a guests dining experience. It allowed the restaurant owner or manager to evaluate his food, service and the overall dining experience from an unbiased customer's viewpoint.

In 1983 we brought that format into Corpus Christi, Texas with the intention of expanding into San Antonio and eventually all over the state. Unfortunately the owner of International League of Diners turned out to be unethical and worse. When he saw that we had developed a thriving business in warm sunny beautiful Corpus Christi "by the sea" he devised a way to gain control of our business. After almost a year long *battle of attorneys* at incredible expense he was defeated, but with our coffers depleted so were we.

Over the next ten years, ideas were developed and capital was replenished until, like the proverbial Phoenix, DineAmerica rose from the ashes. The cornerstone of the new program was the "DiningCard". Instead of a buy-one-get-one-free punch-out one-time-use card, we went with a percentage discount off the total bill and the card could be used repeatedly at

all restaurants. The advantages were numerous for both the restaurant and the diner. The restaurant didn't give away the store to diners who bought the most expensive entrée just to get the most value while drinking water, ordering no appetizers or dessert and leaving a paltry tip, causing everyone to be dissatisfied. The diner on the other hand now had an incentive to order appetizers and dessert because the discount was off the TOTAL bill. Presenting a card that resembles a credit card, instead of a paper coupon enables professionals to also enjoy using the "DiningCard". Finally, the card could benefit the many solo diners where a buy-one-get-one-free was worthless.

In the spring of 1996 in the shadow of the Chicago Bulls' battle for their fifth National Championship we were signing up restaurants in arguably the toughest market in the nation. The Peoria area is known by corporations nationally as a "test market". The saying goes, "if it plays in Peoria it will play anywhere in America". By the time the Bulls laid the competition to rest and the dust had settled on our efforts, DineAmerica had 27 restaurants in the program. Our marketing to diners began in July. By the end of the year DineAmerica had expanded into the Bloomington/Normal area, was approaching the 100 restaurant mark and had almost 1000 members. From that point we began adding services for our restaurants so we could attract more restaurants to our program which in turn would give more value to our members.

Along the way we discovered that some restaurants (particularly fast food franchises) had to have a paper trail when they gave a discount. Consequently we were forced back into the coupon arena. This turned out to be a good thing because we now could offer any restaurant any format they needed. The "DiningCard" had its advantages but coupons had a place as well. Some customers exclusively use the "DiningCard" while others only the buy-one-get-one free coupons and another group uses both. So now we have something for every restaurant and something to please every DineAmerica member. Recently I was talking to someone who realized the value of our program. She said, "Our family has pizza night once a week. I always use one of your buy-one-get-one free coupons to buy one large pizza and get the second one free. We save between \$20 and \$25 each time. You have a great variety of pizza places, so we never get tired of the same one every week." So it dawned on me that if a person uses the pizza coupons each week, they can save over \$1,000 **JUST ON THAT PART OF THE PROGRAM!!** How much more can be saved in a year by using the "DiningCard" as well? This program is certainly a GREAT DEAL for the DineAmerica member!

Sitting in the office early one September morning in peaceful, idyllic downtown Mackinaw (a modern day Mayberry) we were startled to see, on the TV news playing in the background, a plane hit one of the World Trade Center buildings. In shock and disbelief we watched. Our world changed. We grieved and hurt. Business was hurt. Our melancholy changed our focus and desire for several years.

Not long ago we regained our fire and desire and resumed planning to make DineAmerica what its name described. In 2006, on our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we established our Affiliate program and DineAmerica is once again destined for great things with the help of a bunch of talented, hardworking, energetic, resourceful entrepreneurs.