

W. Kenneth Holditch
732 Frenchmen Street
New Orleans, Louisiana 70116
May 20, 2002

President, Board of Directors
Galatoire's Restaurant
209 Bourbon Street
New Orleans, Louisiana 70116

Dear Sir:

My first visit to Galatoire's restaurant was in 1949, when I accompanied my parents to New Orleans. I still remember that meal, especially the entree, truite Almondine, and the elegance and skill of the waiters. Those tuxedo-clad gentleman, against the backdrop of the ambiance of the restaurant itself--mirrors, fans, *et al*--made an indelible impression upon a teen-ager from north Mississippi and indeed became one of the major factors in my decision, fifteen years later, to accept a position at the University of New Orleans so that I could live in this unique city and dine at Galatoire's whenever I wished.

Through the decades since that first magical visit to your restaurant, I have come to look upon it as a haven against the pressures of the world outside. Whenever I walked through that central door into what I came to call the "decompression chamber," then through the swinging doors into the dining room, I was entering another world, a realm of great food, attentive service, a place, in short, to quote a television jingle "where everybody knows your name." The names of the customers have often been illustrious--William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Ernest Hemingway, Walker Percy--but it has always been "the regulars," the "old guard," who formed the backbone of support for the institution.

Well, the world changes, and dislike it as I may, this aging man must accept that. Your establishment is, after all, not meant solely for the pleasure and comfort of us old-timers, but needs to make money, and I can accept that. When many radical changes were made during the last three years by the new management, including a drastic renovation that eliminated my "decompression chamber," and the addition of an upstairs dining area, referred to by many regulars as "Siberia," I could accept that. I even acceded to the abandonment of of the elegant napkins embroidered with the distinctive red talisman, "Galatoire's," and their replacement by polyester squares which will not stay on the lap. Although I complained about the fact that an ice machine, grinding out fast-melting cubes, had replaced the old-fashioned method of chipping the ice into large glacial pieces that lasted much longer and cooled much better, I finally gave in to the inevitable. I still have trouble with the fact that the dress code has been, for the most part, abandoned, and that people who seem to be arrayed to go to the beach or Disneyland, wearing blue jeans and sweatshirts or worse, are ushered in to be seated next to a table where some well dressed elderly couple, long-time patrons, sit, mourning the passing of a more gracious era.

All these I have accepted--more or less because I had to if I wanted to continue to dine in my favorite restaurant in the world. Now, however, the firing of Gilbert Eyzaguierre, preceded

by the peremptory dismissal of other old-time waiters (the tragic case of Caesar comes to mind), the refusal to rehire Randy, and the banishment of others to the upstairs Siberia, removing them in effect from the loyal customers for whom they had been preferred servers through the years, has made many of us "old-timers" aware of the fact that something drastic is afoot, a renovation not only of the physical features of the classic old Creole eatery, but a renovation of its very soul.

First the configuration of the building had to go, then the waiters, one by one, and next, one can only suppose, the regulars, the legion of those who have supported Galatoire's through the good years and the bad, will be driven away, depressed by the radical changes, and the new clientele will consist of a younger "hip" crowd of tourists, unfamiliar with the traditions of this grand establishment and consequently unaware of what has been lost, never to be regained. Then the proponents of change will be free to do whatever they want. Not only is tradition difficult to establish, but once lost or destroyed, it can never be regained. Do you really want the traditions of your historic establishment to be swept out by a new wave of clueless youth?

Is it really desirable to turn Galatoire's, a classic French bistro established and carefully preserved by those distinguished members of the Galatoire family--Jean, Justin Sr. and Leon Sr, and Miss Yvonne, and their descendants who perpetuated the legacy of their antecedents--into yet another of those tourist hangouts where young perky waiters or waitresses, totally unaware of the tradition into which they have stumbled by chance, introduce themselves to their equally unaware customers with such phrases as "Hi, I'm Kevin [or Karen or whatever], I'll be your wait-person for the evening. Would you like to hear our specials?" One such young, uninformed waitress, unaware of her good fortune in being an unsuspecting and probably undeserving part of such a great tradition, seems to be at the bottom of the unsubstantiated charges against Gilbert. To what extent has she been examined as to the truth of her charges--and has anyone investigated her employment history?

As a long-time academician, I know that there is a well established procedure for investigating charges of harrassment, a procedure made necessary by the fact that it is so easy to make such a charge that some young people do so, unthinkingly, in the hope that they will be advanced, unaware that they are opening a Pandora's Box that once opened is never again to be contained. As a scholar of Southern literature, an author, and a guide who conducts literary tours of the Quarter (Galatoire's *has been* a prime site on that tour), I have recommended the restaurant to in excess of one thousand out-of-towners a year, many of whom later reported to me that they had enjoyed the unique Galatoire's experience and appreciate my recommendation.. My friends think of me as the best living advertisement for Galatoire's and often, if they see me walking through the Quarter, wearing a coat and tie, will say, "You must be going to Galatoire's.". More often than not--in the past--they have been correct; who can say what the future holds? If the changes continue, I will have to reconsider the strength of my recommendations.

I urge members of the board and the members of the Galatoire family, a family that has contributed much to this community, not the least contribution being the establishment of a restaurant that still, despite the radical and ill-advised changes, is unique, unparalleled by any other establishment in many regards--I urge them to reconsider and ask themselves, "Do we want

to be merely a theme restaurant? Do we want waiters in Hawaiian shirts and do we want to drive away the customers, many of them descendants of men and women known to our ancestors, to be replaced by tourists from Iowa and Indiana in jeans, halter tops, and sandals?"

Surely not. I urge you, not only for his sake, but for the sake of his many, many loyal customers and the other career waiters at Galatoire's, and for the sake of your dedicated regulars, to reinstate Gilbert *post haste*, and stop the radical, devastating tide of change inaugurated three years ago. Dismissals may be warranted, but of whom? Surely not one of your best waiters, one of your biggest attractions.

Gilberto has waited on me for twenty years, and I have brought hundreds of friends, relatives, reporters and photographers there to enjoy a unique experience that, whether some people like it or not, has always been enhanced by the skill and courtesy of the *career* waiters. Gone are the days when waiters made drinks for their customers, so that now one is at the mercy of some often incompetent bartender who does not know the difference between a Sazerac and a Manhattan. Yet still the professional waiters matter and will continue to do so until whoever it is that, insensitive to tradition, wants to restructure Galatoire's into his image of what a "modern" restaurant can be has his way. Then it will be too late to regain what has been lost. One cannot throw away an integral part of an effective unit and expect the unit to survive unscathed. I realize that making a profit is an important part of any business, but *should profit take precedence over principle?*

Thank you,

W. Kenneth Holditch, Ph.D