

Restaurant Noise: Make Your Voice Heard!

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

Restaurants fall into one of three noise-level categories: those that deliberately raise the volume, those that make an effort to reduce the noise level, and those that are clueless. How does one know in advance which category a restaurant belongs in? This issue, it seems, is beginning to grow some legs.

As reported in the *Inquirer* in July, and following a similar article in the Winter 2014 issue of the *Center City Quarterly*, Friends in the City (FitC) gathered at the PCI branch of the Free Library on Rittenhouse Square recently to hear a panel discussion on the subject of restaurant noise. Moderated by Dane Wells, the panelists included Penn Medicine clinical audiologist Linda Ronis-Kass, Acentech acoustical consultant Terry Tyson, and Starr Restaurant architect Sydney Stewart. The audience was full of people who are unhappy with the deafening noise of many Center City restaurants. The meeting was intended to find out how to judge restaurants on noise control; what we can do about it; how to communicate our dissatisfaction; and how to avoid restaurants whose noise levels are too high.

According to Tyson, acoustical methods are available to solve the problem of loud noise, but first the restaurant has to recognize it has a problem. It's simple: hard surfaces increase reverberations, and soft surfaces decrease

them. Some soft materials may look like wood or tile so you can't always tell by appearance.

Loud conversations and music are the most frequently cited complaints. Stewart says that Starr Restaurants keep the music at a high enough level so you don't hear the conversation at the next table. The result, however, is that diners often must speak louder to be heard above the music. Stewart mentioned Parc as an example of a restaurant that tries to control noise; several attendees said that Parc is noisy, and many questioned their noise-control effort. Stewart said Starr restaurant staffers read online reviews so it's important to write comments.

Ronis-Kass recommends learning to read lips, a solution useful for those who are hard of hearing, but unlikely to be adopted by the average person. She says that 75 decibels is the maximum healthy continuous sound level that people should be exposed to, and when you get above 85 decibels for over 20 minutes, your hearing is at risk for permanent damage. The decibel scale is logarithmic, which means a reading of 85 is 100 times louder than 75. Wells recommends getting a decibel app for your smart phone and measuring the sound volume in the restaurant. Use that information when reviewing the restaurant or complaining to the manager.

So what can you do to find the perfect restaurant? When you reserve a table, ask for a quiet one. OpenTable, an online reservation service, includes diners' noise-level ratings, so before you book, take a look at the average rating for noise. (On OpenTable, "energetic" means loud.) Yelp does not have separate ratings for noise level, but you can search for a quiet restaurant by zip code. The search result is based on comments made by reviewers.

The FitC Forum has a new section: Conversation Friendly Restaurants where FitC members can post comments. There are already several messages posted in that section including a list of quieter restaurants, <http://friendscentercity.org/forums/conversation-friendly-restaurants>

Dane Wells concluded with this recommendation: "When you ... are dissatisfied with the noise level, instead of just walking out disgruntled, voice your opinion to the manager." After each dining experience, write online reviews on OpenTable or Yelp, and post comments, reviews, and recommendations on the FitC Forum in the Conversation Friendly Restaurant section. Many restaurants have contact options on their website, so you can also send emails directly to them.

CCCulture

Philadelphia Jewish Film Festival Mavens Celebrate 35 Years

By Eric O'Hara

This November, the Gershman Y's Philadelphia Jewish Film Festival (PJFF) celebrates its landmark 35th anniversary season. Founded in 1980 by Judy Golden and the late Archie Perlmutter, the PJFF is among the longest-running Jewish film festivals in America, and shows no signs of slowing down. We spoke with Golden, Ruth Perlmutter (Archie's widow), and current Chair Phyllis Fischer about the early history of the festival and their involvement today. All three reside in Center City.

Festival Co-founder Judy Golden was a longtime PJFF Chair, and continues her involvement as Chair Emeritus. A native of the

Wynnefield section of Philadelphia, Golden is a University of Pennsylvania and Harvard graduate, who, in addition to her real-estate career and prolific work as a ceramic artist, has spent most of her adult life donating time to the non-profit arts community, much of it centered at the Gershman Y.

In the early 1960s, Joan Kron chaired the Gershman Y Arts Council, a program that brought avant-garde artists (many of them New Yorkers) from diverse creative disciplines—theater, dance, music, fine arts—to premiere their work in Philadelphia. "Joan invited my husband and me to be subscribers,

Continued p. 21



Olivia Arasis

Ruth Perlmutter