



SALUTING AMERICA'S WORKERS



Every time Mike Leeson visited a theme restaurant, he felt there was something missing. Then it hit him: No restaurant anywhere paid homage to working men and women.

Thus was born Industrial Revolution in Valparaiso, a prototype of what Leeson hopes will become a national chain of similar restaurants. The restaurant, which opened last May, seats 180 and has 55 employees.

"I've been in the steel business, and I've always had this nutty idea that I ought to go into the restaurant business," says Leeson. "I've been a kind of restaurant critic. There are a lot of themes out there, but nothing to celebrate industry. I think that's the backbone of our country."

Founder and sole-owner of the restaurant, Leeson has created a classic design that takes customers back to the 1930s. The goal is not to focus on the Great Depression, but instead to look at innovation and salute the country's industrial greatness.

The focal point of the restaurant's exterior is a steel sculpture of several ironworkers sitting on an I-beam. The sculpture, says Leeson, was on display for six months at Ground Zero in New York, but when it left there, he acquired it and made it part of his restaurant.

"I want to salute the people who've sacrificed to make this country great," says Leeson. Each week, the restaurant features someone from America's past who has made a major contribu-

tion to innovation or greatness. The honorees have ranged from inventor Thomas Edison to Todd Beamer, one of the heroes of Flight 93 that was hijacked on Sept. 11, 2001.

Also inside, there are 28 flat-screen televisions, but instead of sports, Leeson says each shows different versions of popular cable television shows "Modern Marvels" and "Biography." The background music, says Leeson, is from the Big Band era.

"There is a lot going on in the restaurant," says Leeson. "We have a fantastic chef who specializes in handcrafted food and drinks. I think people are surprised by the level of detail there is in his creations. The restaurant is designed to fill the void between casual and upscale dining."

Among the most popular items on the menu, says Leeson, is the Awesome Burger, Double Shift Pot Roast, and Baja Perch Tacos. The restaurant doesn't yet have a full liquor menu, but does serve beer and wine.

"The whole idea for this was to create a new theme restaurant. If it works in Valparaiso, I think it will work anywhere," says Leeson. ■

Industrial Revolution is at 1804 Linwood Ave., Valparaiso, just off U.S. 30 near Valparaiso University. Hours are 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., Sunday to Thursday and from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. For more information, call (219) 465-1801 or visit the Web site www.industrialrevolutioneatery.com.