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Nine-Ten Restaurant celebrates quarter century of operations

Nine-Ten Restaurant opened on July 17, 2001 as part of the Grande Colonial hotel at 910 Prospect St.

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While Nine-Ten Restaurant & Bar's menu, hours, staff and more have changed over time, its foundation and philosophy remains 25 years after it first opened its doors.

The eatery started as the La Jolla Drugstore in 1928, before it became Putnam's Pharmacy, a spot known for its soda foundation and community feel, and eventually Putnam's Grill. Named for its address, Nine-Ten opened on July 17, 2001 as part of the Grande Colonial hotel on 910 Prospect St.

Nine-Ten has been shepherded by Jason Knibb, the restaurant's executive chef, for 23 of its 25 years. From the time he first joined the staff, he said the restaurant had already been committed to "seasonal, ingredient-driven



The main dining room at Nine-Ten Restaurant in La Jolla. PHOTOS BY NINE-TEN RESTAURANT

He explained, "Over the years, we've grown into a more mature farm-to-table restaurant with a contemporary American approach, refining our techniques while building even stronger relationships with local farmers, artisans, and purveyors. What hasn't changed is our dedication to finding the best locally sourced products available and treating those ingredients with respect."

A Los Angeles native, Knibb had frequented San Diego for

surf trips and spent time with his wife's family, who lived there. So when his friend Trey Foshee, a chef and partner at George's at the Cove, helped connect him with Nine-Ten, he was hooked.

Knibb has now run the kitchen for over two decades and even represented the restaurant on Food Network's "Iron Chef America" in November 2011, when he



Executive chef Jason Knibb has been at the helm of Nine-Ten restaurant for 23 years.

faced off against acclaimed chef Bobby Flay.

Knibb called it “one of the most intense experiences of my career,” both “exciting and stressful” as he and Flay engaged in a caviar and seafood battle. While Knibb didn’t claim victory, he says “the memories, the camaraderie, and the opportunity to showcase our team on a national stage made us all feel like winners.”

Outside the kitchen, Grande Colonial general manager Kim Avant has witnessed Nine-Ten’s evolution from the hotel’s side. Avant has worked at Grande Colonial for 16 years, starting as an assistant general manager, following that up with a tenure in human resources, and ultimately landing the GM position.

“Something that I think is really unique about both the hotel and the restaurant is that it’s smaller — more quaint, if you will — but that really allows us to provide a personalized level of service that

you might not get at a restaurant that’s seating 300 people a night,” she said.

Avant’s time as general manager included the years of the COVID-19 pandemic. That time was “definitely a challenge,” she said.

“Even with the idea of re-opening, there were so many restrictions around restaurants and the safety measures and everything,” she explained. “Being an independent hotel like we are, we didn’t have a Hilton or a Marriott coming up with the idea of what that structure was going to look like.”

A rebound effect followed in 2022, she added, where a combination of available vaccines, small group travel returning and customers’ pent-up desire to be out and about led to the hotel’s best year on record.

Just last year, they adjusted their hours from being open five nights a week to seven. As they navigate rising costs and inflation,

Avant says their 2026 numbers are looking strong.

“Some (restaurants) open and close, sometimes within a matter of months or within only a few years,” Avant said. “So I think being able to say we’ve been here 25 years ... we’re really a staple in the La Jolla community.”

Over time, Nine-Ten’s ingredient-driven and seasonal menu has undergone many changes. But one staple, Knibb says, is their half-baked chocolate cake.

A quarter century after they’ve opened, Knibb says they’ve learned that some classics are worth keeping around.

“It’s simple, and people love chocolate, especially when it’s warm and comforting,” Knibb said. “The dessert has been on the menu since day one, and while we’ve tried over the years to replace it with newer, more modern desserts, our guests always let us know they want it back.”



Before Nine-Ten Restaurant opened as part of Grande Colonial 910 Prospect St. in 2001, the space was occupied by La Jolla Pharmacy.