

THE Manhattan

By Kelley Moots

For 42 years the Manhattan Restaurant has been a gathering place for people of all walks of life, from farmers and businessmen to such famous musicians as the Ink Spots, Little Jimmy Dickens and the "Grand Old Opry Gang," and the great Louis Armstrong.

The Manhattan was opened on March 18, 1942, by Bill and LaVena Stoukas. Mr. Stoukas was originally from Glenn Falls, New York. He came to Kirksville to attend the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine. After attending KCOM for about a year, Mr. Stoukas decided to follow his second passion, the restaurant business. He married a Kirksville resident, LaVena Musick, and together they established the Manhattan Restaurant (named after Manhattan, New York) at 108 South Elson Street.

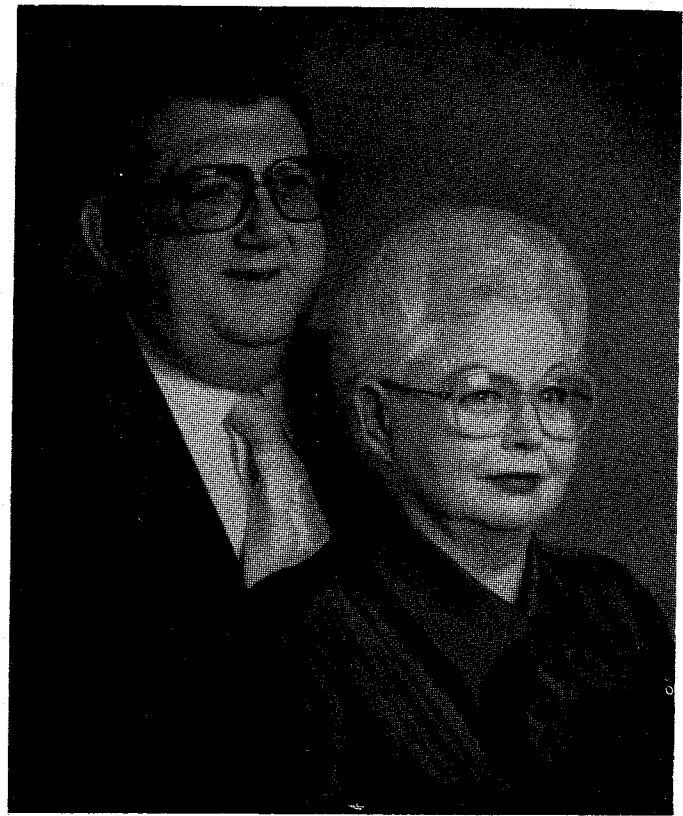
The grand opening was successful! This success was mainly attributed to the popular menu consisting of such delicacies as scrambled eggs with brains, pigs' knuckles with sauerkraut, and boiled tongue with spinach.

Because Mr. Stoukas' father was born and raised in Greece, Greek foods have always been a part of the Manhattan menu. These include such items as Athenian salad, gyro sandwiches in pita bread, and the Greek dessert, baklava. Many common foods such as Italian spaghetti and flaming steak were first introduced to the Kirksville community by the Manhattan.

In the early sixties, the Stoukas' bought a chicken broasting machine from a traveling salesman. The new innovation was promoted by an "all-you-can-eat" chicken special. The present owner Mrs. Diana Bethel, the Stoukas' daughter, remembers "all the bones under the tables when kids would come in after school and totally eat their hearts out!" Thus, broasted chicken has since been the Manhattan specialty, and students have continued to be popular customers.

At age 15, Mrs. Bethel began working in the restaurant. She can recall when "bus loads of people would come in without warning and I would be the only waitress on the floor. It was very frightening, but I gained a lot of experience." For about two years Mrs. Bethel has owned and operated the Manhattan. Her daughter, Brenda, currently works at the restaurant as a cook.

Several changes have taken place at the Manhattan since its opening. Mrs. Bethel recalls that there were juke boxes on each of the tables when she began working. These have been replaced by a single television set at the front of the dining room. A long wooden counter with soda bar has been replaced by a shorter counter and more tables which provide a more



Bill and LaVena Stoukas, original owners of the Manhattan.

formal dining atmosphere and eliminate the soda shop atmosphere. Fourteen original watercolor paintings now line the walls. These paintings were done by Mrs. Stoukas' brother, the nationally noted artist, W. E. Musick. New changes in the menu include the addition of a shrimp dinner and a taco salad.

The Manhattan Restaurant has remained in the same location. Competition doesn't seem to affect the Manhattan, even though Kirksville has grown and there are many other restaurants. The restaurant's popularity is probably because the Manhattan is a family-type restaurant and is popular with people of all descriptions. The customers have an opportunity to know the owner, providing them with an "at-home" feeling.

The food and service add greatly to this "at-home" atmosphere. All the food is made from scratch, including the old-fashioned bread, and no liquor is served. The workers strive for teamwork and friendly, efficient service. With everyone working together, the family-type atmosphere of the Manhattan Restaurant is complete.