

Shari's Café & Pies

By Edwin Battistella

Ron and Sharon Bergquist opened the first Shari's restaurant—named after Sharon—in Hermiston, Oregon, in 1978. The couple had been living in Hermiston since 1974 and for a time operated the Blue Bucket Restaurant. An architect, Ron Bergquist had a vision for a new restaurant design and "Shari" Bergquist helped develop a menu of traditional comfort foods like pie and country fried steak.

Shari's in Hermiston was followed by restaurants in Sherwood and Newberg, and today there are about a hundred Shari's restaurants in Oregon, Washington, California, Idaho, Nebraska, and Wyoming. Forty-five of those locations are in Oregon, along with about 1,600 of the chain's more than 4,000 employees.

All of the restaurants, which seat about 120 diners, have Bergquist's signature 4,000-square-foot hexagonal shape, which is intended to maximize window space and minimize the distance between booths and the kitchen area. They also feature high-backed booths for privacy and noise control. Operating since 2011 as Shari's Café & Pies, it is the largest full-service restaurant chain in the Pacific Northwest, open twenty-four hours a day and with revenues of more than \$175 million.

Shari's is a privately held corporation with headquarters in Beaverton. In 1985, Ron Bergquist sold the chain, which had thirty-three restaurants at the time and annual sales of about \$30 million, to StratAmerica. It was sold again in 1992 to the Battistone Financial Group and in 1999 to the Fairmont Capital Inc. for \$60 million. In 2006, a consortium of restaurant investors, led by Circle Peak Capital LLC, purchased the chain for a reported \$80 million.

Over the years, Shari's leadership has been stable. The company was headed for twenty-four years by Larry Curtis, who was president from 1984 until his retirement in 2008. Bruce MacDiarmid, formerly of Black Angus Steakhouse, followed Curtis as CEO.

Shari's has continued to innovate both in business practices and in cuisine. Its Water and Energy Efficiency Program reduced energy usage by 22 percent from 2008 to 2010, and the Oregon Sustainability Board recognized the company for its efforts to operate a sustainable business. Each year, the chain updates its design and menu based on customer research and menu testing. In 2007, the chain eliminated trans fats from its cooking process, and it also shifted to locally sourced and fresh ingredients.

Shari's has received many awards for its signature pies, including Gold Medals at the National Pie Championships in Orlando, Florida, in 2010, three gold medals in 2012, and four gold medals in 2013.

In the 2020s, Shari's faced increasing financial challenges, which became insurmountable. In 2023, the chain was faced with unpaid bills, back taxes, and eviction notices, and the company owed more than \$900,000 to the Oregon Lottery. During the early fall, several locations around the state and Northwest closed, and on October 20, 2024, all Oregon Shari's locations closed, as well.

Sources

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