

3.1: Chapter Introduction

Westbrook Lobster

Source: Used with permission, Michael Larivere, manager, Westbrook Lobster, Wallingford, CT.



Figure 3.1.1: Plates of food at Westbrook Lobster

In 1957, Westbrook Lobster opened in Westbrook, Connecticut, as a specialized lobster and fish market. As time went on, the company expanded to offer a comprehensive range of fish, shrimp, and prepared foods. In 1989, Larry Larivere, who grew up near the docks of New Bedford, Massachusetts, bought the business and had a dream of expanding the business with a seafood restaurant.

Fast forward to 2004. Larry and his two sons, Michael (an environmental science major) and Matthew (a business major), opened up their second restaurant in Wallingford, Connecticut. It overlooks the Quinnipiac River in the historic Yale Brother's Mill built in the late 1670s. Originally a grain mill, later converted to a German and Britannia silver spoon factory, and finally converted into a restaurant, the building was rich with history.

Michael speaks easily about the value that Westbrook Lobster offers its customers: high quality food, great service...and visiting the tables while people are dining. He sees these visits as an important part of the relationships that he has built with his customers over the years. Westbrook customers eagerly await the monthly postcards that are sent out that feature dining specials, discounts, and coupons. He tries to get the postcards out early and actually receives phone calls if they are not received early. Many people have come to depend on them. Michael says that these postcards definitely give the restaurant its greatest return. The restaurant has a presence on Facebook, but that is geared to the bar crowd—a younger crowd.

Technology plays an important but mixed part in the restaurant's operations. Michael says that it is tough to run a restaurant these days without technology tools like POS (point of service) systems. These systems include touch screens for placing orders and paying for food items. Interestingly, however, most food vendors still do their business face to face (or telephone to telephone), choosing to stick with personal relationships. Only a few suppliers, such as liquor vendors, accept orders online.

The current Westbrook Lobster website was created by Michael and Matthew using services from intuit.com. They built the site themselves and are proud to note that restaurant gift cards can now be purchased directly from the site. This is a perfect example of Web 2.0 capabilities.

As far as running the business, currently fifty employees strong, Larry Larivere (Dad) is brought in on the big decisions. Otherwise, Michael and Mathew run the restaurants on their own. There are currently no other family members in the business.

Westbrook Lobster continues to provide the freshest seafood available at competitive prices. The daily selection includes everything from locally harvested shellfish to fresh fish from waters up and down the East Coast. They also offer several "healthy" options that are made without butter or bread crumbs. These menu items are very popular and are especially attractive for people with food allergies or people who just want to eat a bit lighter. All their efforts continue to pay off. Westbrook Lobster was voted "Best Seafood Restaurant Statewide" in *Connecticut Magazine* 2009 and "Best Seafood in New Haven County" in *Connecticut Magazine* 2009 and 2010.

Larry, Michael, and Matthew invite you to Westbrook Lobster when you are in the area. Once you are there, you are family.

Source: "The Lobster Tale," www.westbrooklobster.com/Wall...ally_home.html (accessed on October 8, 2011) and interview with Michael Larivere, October 11, 2010.

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