

Naperville catering company founders take the next step



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My Chef Catering in Naperville founders Bill and Karen Garlough are retiring and sold the business to three longtime employees.

Daniel White | Staff Photographer, file photo

After nearly three decades of working side by side growing a Naperville catering company, Bill and Karen Garlough are moving onto the next phase of their lives and may travel a bit or spend the winters somewhere warm.

"We may do the snowbird lifestyle," Bill said, adding that they also want to enjoy time with friends and family. For the past 28 years, the owners have worked just about every weekend, as that's what you do when you operate a thriving catering company.

And as they have organized every aspect of the business over the years, they also spent a great deal of time developing a succession plan for [My Chef Catering](#). In 2005, the couple outlined ways to develop, grow and exit the business. At that time, they thought it might be about 2016 when they thought about selling the business.

They were right on.

The couple do not have children. "But we have a group of dedicated extended family" that have assisted in running the company, said Bill, 64.

The couple recently announced that they sold the business to longtime employees -- Director of Catering Sales Dominick Scafidi, Executive Chef Mark Walter and Accountant Megan Rousonelos.

"This is the ideal ending," said Bill, who added that he and his wife will stay in the wings as consultants for a while.

He said it made sense to have his longtime employees continue to run the business as they know how it's done. "This provides stability for the current staff," he said, adding that the customers will also have a "seamless transition" and receive the same service they always have.

The co-owners met while working in the corporate world. They married nearly 37 years ago and decided to launch a gourmet deli with gift baskets, exported meats and cheeses and catering in Naperville. The couple saw a niche for upscale catering grow.

"During our first 10 years, we saw 40 percent growth a year," Bill said. The catering portion grew 95 percent while retail grew 5 percent," he said. In 1996, they grew the business to a larger location where catering was the focus.

How was it working with your spouse 24/7?

"Tough at times," Bill says with a laugh. He added that they split the responsibilities to help alleviate problems. "Karen handled catering and sales and delivery and I took the financial side," Bill said. "We had our own turf."

The business owners are proud of their accomplishments over the years. They were named The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Small Business of 2007, have been repeatedly recognized by top online wedding industry sites including The Knot and Wedding Wire, and recently won Naperville Magazine's Best Caterers for 2016.

They expect the recognition to continue and that the transition will be smooth. "Our goals when we founded My Chef were to create a quality-minded business, provide a stable and respectful environment for our employees and to be actively involved in our community," Bill said.

"We feel we accomplished a lot and are leaving things in good shape"