



Martha's was once the neighborhood laundromat.

Martha's 22nd Street Grill

Martha's 22nd Street Grill first opened in 1983 with four tables on a site that was previously operated as a laundromat.

"Not a very glamorous beginning!" states Pamela Billings, owner since 1990.

But what was once suds and duds has evolved to skates and dates. Martha's is the quintessential Southern Californian indoor and outdoor beach view cafe, complete with customers in bathing attire, surfing gear,

cycling suits and seashore accessories. Located away from the popular downtown area, Martha's unusual location is a distinct part of its popularity.

"It took many years to develop the restaurant," says Pamela. "We're not near any of the larger streets that the public would more commonly travel. We are a word-of-mouth restaurant, which is why I know that the food and service we offer really matter."

Martha's 22nd Street Grill and Martha's Corner are located on the south side of 22nd Street, between Hermosa Avenue and the Strand. Martha's was originally developed in the 1940's and 1950's as a four unit multi-tenant building. The western unit was a long-lived laundromat. The eastern unit was a real estate office. The middle portion was operated as a restaurant in many guises — Mexican, Chinese, burgers and so forth. In the 1960's, it became the Surf Rider. By the 1980's, Tio Pepes was in operation.

By then, original founders Bob and Lesley Hoffman had converted the real estate office into Hoffman's, a popular sandwich and drink-to-go place. The Hoffman's turned the old laundromat into an indoor restaurant called Martha's. It was named after Bob Hoffman's mother, who is still remembered fondly by some customers. Martha's began with only four tables. As a test, Martha's opened early for breakfast, but it was a hard start due to the out-of-way location.

"Everyone said it would fail," notes Pamela.

A breakfast business slowly

developed. The Hoffman's brought in Paul Schmitt, a third partner with a strong restaurant background. He developed the core operation that eventually expanded into the Tio Pepe's space.

"By then, the owners were tired and they sold out to me," says Pam. "I was a corporate refugee, glad for a change. Still am. My background is in national corporate banking. After graduating from UCSD in 1974 with a degree in biology, I became a research assistant at UCSD, UCLA and USC in the area of molecular biology, then an unknown field. I got my M.B.A. at the University of North Carolina in 1980. My husband, Joseph Bannister, is a computer scientist working as an Associate Director for ISI-USC in Marina Del Rey. He received his Ph.D. in computer science from UCLA in 1984. We have lived nearby in Manhattan Beach since 1985, enjoy the restaurant and the South Bay community, and have the intention to stay doing what we are doing for quite some time. We've got a great staff and we love our customers!"

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