

## Landrum hands over the keys to Ray's the Classics to two employees

By Tim Carman, Updated: July 2, 2013

Seven years after he opened [Ray's the Classics](#) in Silver Spring, Michael Landrum has "passed along" the restaurant to two loyal employees who will assume ownership of the steakhouse, located across the street from another homage to the Jazz Age, the [AFI Silver Theatre](#).

Landrum could not be immediately reached for comment, but Elliott Rattley, one of the new owners, said the terms of the deal were "very favorable" to the buyers. Rattley declined to go into specifics, but said Landrum offered the deal so that Rattley and Nick Lopata, another Classics veteran, could "continue to serve the neighborhood, because we are neighborhood-oriented."

The steakhouse officially changed hands on Monday. By the end of the month, Rattley said the restaurant will change its name, too. It will be known, simply, as the Classics. The "Ray's" handle, of course, has become synonymous with Landrum's meat-based empire.

"There will be no change in the steaks and burgers," Rattley said, noting the Classics will source and prepare them exactly as before. After a while, perhaps six months or longer, Rattley said the Classics will "probably bring back the things that the guests are asking for, one or two at a time."

If you'll recall, Landrum launched Ray's the Classics as more than a steakhouse. Under former [Citronelle](#) chef Michael Hartzler, the restaurant ventured well beyond the cow, serving up buttermilk-brined fried chicken, scampi baklava and even stuffed olives wrapped in puff pastry. (Check out Tom Sietsema's [original 2006 review](#).) Rattley wouldn't tip his hand on what dishes might return, but his tease bodes well for the ambitions of the new owners.

Speaking of whom, Rattley and Lopata are long-time fixtures in the local and regional hospitality industry.

Rattley has been working behind bars, in the kitchen and in dining rooms since 1972, he says. Among other places, Rattley has worked at [Cafe Milano](#), Butterfield 9 (where Todd English now dishes out chef-driven Mexican cuisine at [MXDC](#)) and the Melrose in the Park Hyatt Washington hotel (where the [Blue Duck Tavern](#) is now). Rattley has been an instrumental part of the Ray's empire, helping Landrum with his various projects in Arlington, the District and Silver Spring. Rattley was an owner once before, briefly, as proprietor of a small college bar on Long Island.

Lopata began his career in the mid-1980s in Baltimore with the American Cafe chain, before moving to the Polo Grill, where he worked as a bartender. Lopata took a break from the restaurant business, only to return in 2006 when he took a job as bartender at Ray's the Classics, his first gig in the Washington area. Lopata has never been an owner until now.

"It feels great," Lopata says about ownership. "It's a little overwhelming, but it feels great. It's been a dream for awhile. With Michael and Elliott, they made it possible for me to do so. I can't thank them enough."

The Classics deal means Landrum's business holdings are now all based in Arlington. He [closed Ray's the Steaks at East River](#) in 2012, and, in a dispute with his landlord, [Landrum was forced out](#) of his two Ray's Hell-Burger locations in Arlington earlier this year. Landrum has three establishments now under the Ray's brand: [Ray's the Steaks](#), Retro Ray's and [Ray's3](#).

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