

# Entrepreneur recounts jet-set past

## Lenny sees weiners as winners

By SHEILA SCHMITZ  
Of the Emerald

It wasn't enough to rub elbows with jet-setters and celebrities, to make and lose a million dollars and to travel all over the world from the South Pacific to Lichtenstein.

Lenny Nathan "just had a flavor" to set up a gourmet hot dog restaurant in Eugene, Oregon.

Well, sort of.

Actually, Lenny had a flavor to set up a giant nosh bar ("nosh" is Yiddish for munchies) with mezzanine rooms and spacious outdoor eating areas. But until he earns part of that million back, he'll have to settle for the truncated version in the 13th Avenue Courtyard.

Lenny's journey to Eugene began when he left Detroit in 1938 at the age of 17. After waiting tables in the Navy, he sold Indian jewelry and sunglasses down the aisles of Sante Fe trains.

A train derailment later broke his back and ended that career, but a court settlement of \$12,000 from the accident en-

abled him to set up a diamond business in Los Angeles. That was the start he needed, and with it he says he made a million dollars.

Lenny's life was then full of transcontinental flights, marriages and business schemes. He says he bought a night club in Majorca, Spain, moved to Wimbledon, England, and ran a diamond syndicate in Lichtenstein.

At Wimbledon, a London actor he roomed with introduced him to the theatre crowd, where he befriended such notables as Oliver Reed. It was a life of parties at "Ollie's" house, jaunts to Paris and the Mediterranean and long-distance business calls, Lenny says.

But during this jolly time, Lenny's second wife back home in California was silently plotting his destruction, he says. She squandered money on racehorses and the social life, and managed to use up most of Lenny's wealth on her own investments.

So Lenny hurried back to the States to salvage the remnants



Lenny Nathan, before his bearded, long-haired days, sits in a Paris bistro with actor Oliver Reed

of his fortune. After three years of litigation, he settled for a fraction of it, he says.

By this time it was the late 1960s, so Lenny traded his black bow tie for some wood beads and opened an art museum at Haight-Ashbury, where he sold funky posters like the ones that now adorn his restaurant. He later added an English-surplus boutique, vending such things as bobby capes and

velvet Edwardian suits.

When the police raids and the riots broke out in 1969, Lenny left the bohemian life. His fortune and dreams of retirement gone, he was in the market for another career. His oldest son happened to live in Eugene at the time, so Lenny came here to try his hand at the nosh business.

If not for that divorce settlement some years ago, Lenny claims his restaurant would now be a grand affair in the center of town or down the street from Hayward Field.

Instead, Lenny made cheesecakes to survive, selling them to local restaurants and at the Saturday Market. Still determined to have his dream come true — "By that time, I just had to do it" — Lenny settled for the smallish spot in the Courtyard and went to work.

Although his nosh originally included fare ranging from omelettes to meatball sandwiches, his small shop shrank his menu possibilities: now Lenny serves just hot dogs.

"But these are not just any old hot dogs," he says, brandishing a wiggly specimen with his tongs. These weinies come in long strings from Casper's of San Francisco. "They have real skins on them, and that kind is hard to find," he says.

Patrons can also sample Lenny's almond-mocha or chocolate-rum cheesecake and match wits with one of six video games.

Money is tight these days, especially since those signs were stolen from outside the Courtyard, but Lenny remains optimistic about the future.

"I just hope I don't fall over into the hot-dog steamer," he says.

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