



CAPTAIN BILL'S
SENECA LAKE CRUISES
SENECA HARBOR STATION

Meet Mark Simiele, owner of Seneca Harbor Station and Captain Bill's Seneca Lake Cruises...

1. Describe Your Business:

The Simiele family has been operating their businesses on Seneca Lake for many years now. "We have several components. We have Captain Bill's Seneca Lake

Cruises. That's how we got started – with a single sightseeing cruise. We continue to maintain that with hourly sightseeing cruises," Mark said. "We have a dinner vessel as well. There have been several incarnations of that, but the current one is the Seneca Legacy, and it offers brunch, lunch, and dinner cruises." They also have a gift shop, a small marina, and Seneca Harbor Station, a full-service restaurant.

2. Tell us your story:

"I grew up here with my dad," Mark said. "I was a young guy, and I enjoyed hanging around with my father and being around the business. Back then it was just a handful of employees, and they were mostly teenagers. It was a fun place for a kid to hang out." Mark went away for school and received a Business Economics degree at Oneonta State University. After college, Mark moved to Florida and worked in a sales job for five years. "In 1986 my dad asked if I would entertain the thought of coming back," Mark said. "He was looking to purchase a second vessel. I said yes. I thought it would be great to work with my father again." Mark and his father, Bill, purchased the boat in Florida, renovated it, and brought it up to Seneca Lake in the spring of 1986. That became their first dining vessel. "When I came back, I thought I would just help my dad out for a few years until he retired. That was 32 years ago, and I'm still here!" Mark said.

3. What has helped you succeed and gain experience?

"Really the main key to my success has been the influence of my father," Mark said. "I grew up on his hip. I was in the room when he negotiated and did business dealings. I just learned from him. I found out when I was in college that if you came from a family that was in business you had a much higher chance of succeeding. It's really not even the knowledge. It's understanding how hard the work is going to be. Most people who jump into business from a regular job don't really understand the commitment and hours it takes to succeed on your own."

4. What inspires you?

"I enjoy creating a work environment and culture that is unique to what we do. I know that a lot of the waitstaff that come work in our restaurant remark that the culture here is much different from others," Mark explained. "There's no push and pull between the front and back of the house. I take pride in creating a civil, safe work environment where people can make a living. When things are working well you get those moments of satisfaction knowing that you've built something and that it is running." Mark added that he has also been very inspired by the community in Watkins Glen over the time he has been here. "We had very humble beginnings here, and as the community has grown we've grown with it. We're inspired to keep pace with what is happening in the community," he said.

5. What keeps you up at night? What are your challenges?

"Lots of things keep me up at night. Things that are out of my control keep me up at night," Mark said. "because in business you can only control so many elements. There are outside factors that affect what is happening. So, trying to figure out how you're going to navigate around some of the changes that are coming and some of the things that are already happening. You have to constantly be on your toes to forecast what's changing in the markets so that you can keep pace." Mark added that one of their challenges is labor. "We have 140 employees for the bulk of the season. The challenge we have that is unique to our business is that we are a seasonal business. We go from about 10 employees in the off-season to 140 in peak season, then ramp back down," Mark said. "That ramping up and ramping down and keeping everyone happy is a challenge for us."

6. What is your favorite local activity?

"We still marvel and enjoy the gorge trail at Watkins Glen State Park when we go," Mark said. "I take my youngest son through a couple of times a year. The advent of all the entertainment at wineries and breweries is something new on the horizon that really wasn't here ten years ago. We enjoy that. Unfortunately, we don't get out a lot during the season because we're so busy here. But those new things that have kind of crept up are a really nice addition to the area."