



## Milestones since 1956



- 🍷 **1956**— Robert “Bob” Kraft asks his mother Helen Kraft for a piece of the backyard along Route 1 Kittery to open a fried clam take-out stand. She agrees. There is some struggle coming up with a name. “Bob’s” is a clear choice, as is the word “Clam” as Bob loves clamming and has developed his own special recipe. Fried clams are to be the central product. He is also inspired by El’s Fried Clams in Ogunquit which he loves and respects. But Bob does not want his new place to be a shack or a house. Eventually someone says “Hut” and the all agree.
- 🍷 **1956-1974** - During these years Bob’s hope is that the clam hut will support him and family and that he will not need to go back to taxi driving or working construction in NJ. As Bob was fond of saying, the clam hut never had a down year from 1956 on and it remains his sole form of employment until his retirement.

Still things are considerably slower on Route 1 in the early years. Bob suns himself lying out on Route 1 to stop cars so he can serve the folks inside. Then he takes a swim in Spruce Creek.

Legend has it that Mrs. Kraft’s pies however are the main attraction. If you eat at Bob’s you then go on over to Bob’s homestead next door and his mother Helen will serve you some of her fantastic pie.

Locals swarm to Bob’s. Friday night folks arrive early to get their standard parking spot even in the dead of winter. Betty, Bob’s wife, knows what time folks arrive and what their order will be. Often she starts cooking it before they order.


- 🍷 **1974** – Bob makes the first addition to the building’s design with a new back room for preparation and storage. Shortly after, a “regular” customer visits Bob’s and drives his car straight into the new room, not realizing it has been added! This knocks over a cooler full of fresh clam gallons.
- 🍷 **1974-1986** – Despite harsh winters and lacking any space inside to stand or sit or any public restrooms Bob’s stays open throughout the year and the loyal local following keeps Bob’s busy. Customers head over to Kittery Trading Post to use facilities.
- 🍷 **1985** -The first mall starts construction. No one thinks they make much sense as NH has no sales tax. Over the next five to ten years the malls keep on coming and the nature of Route 1 Kittery changes.


- 🍷 **April 1986** - Michael Landgarten, fresh off being laid off from a computer programming job in Boston, is in the market for a business. Michael had grown up in Worcester Mass., and attended Bowdoin College in Brunswick ME where he virtually minored in the study of roadside clam shacks. Martin Fox, Michael’s brother-in-law introduces Michael to Charlie, a retired real estate agent living in the Seacoast. Charlie suggests Michael seriously consider Bob’s which is being marketed quietly. At first Michael declines, not thinking running a clam hut is really a fit for him. Charlie persists and Michael goes to work in the restaurant for a day to see if it feels right. After one day Michael realizes what all his love of clam shacks has been pointed at. Michael starts working days at Bob’s to learn the business and nights to write a business plan. He does a great deal of local interviewing and always hears the same thing – Bob’s clams are best – even from staff at other nearby restaurants. Michael finally gets a bank to approve his loan (the 11<sup>th</sup> one, 10 had refused) and purchases Bob’s on May 23, 1986.




- 🍷 **Summer 1986** – Michael’s first summer “in charge” (hardly). Bob’s is crazy busy with lines that stretch to Route 1 (then just a 2 lane road) and turn south toward the Trading Post. At times guests wait 45 minutes just to order at the one cashier window usually (wo)manned by Wilma Wheeler. There is a local journalist who stops to see Wilma almost daily to get his chowder and the latest news. The rest of the staff that summer includes Bob’s son Bob Jr. who has been at Bob’s since he was 9 years old; Bob Jr’s wife Donna; Bob’s daughter Brenda works on Sundays; numerous long term high school staff; and Bob himself. He helps get the place open every morning. This experienced and caring group continues to support Michael and teach him the business.





 **1986** – Lillian Mangos, who would change the face of Bob's, joins the team in November 1986. At the time Bob's is open 3 days a week and the lot is being sublet to a group selling Christmas trees. Lillian pulls up in a long black Continental driven by her husband Nick. She knocks on the door and calls out, "You people hiring?" She follows with: "I'm a good worker. You won't be sorry. I owned my own restaurant for 22 years!" She refuses to fill out an application. When she leaves, Michael, who had been interrupted cleaning out the fryers, looks at his wife Kathleen, who says with no hesitation, "Hire her!" He does.

-  **1987** - Bob's adds local Annabelle's ice cream to the menu. Bob's is one of the first Annabelle customers. Martin Fox oversees the construction and manages the scoop shop for the first couple of summers.
-  **1989** – Michael remodels the clam hut with an expansion of the kitchen – 4 more fryers! - and the addition of a second pick-up window.
-  **1990 – 2006** – One happy day local physician and bandmate of Michael's, Fred Thaler, brings his longtime buddies Ben and Jerry, the ice cream moguls, for a visit to Bob's. While feasting on clams Ben quips "we should have our ice cream here," and so it happens. Bob's sells Ben and Jerry's for many delicious years.
-  **1991** – Another remodel brings about the addition of a heated indoor seating area. The inspiration for this comes from Michael's 3-year-old daughter, Rachael. Eating outside in the car and looking at Bob's, Rachael declares to Michael, "We need indoor seating!" With this remodel Bob's adds first customer bathrooms. Also part of this remodel means the demolition of Bob's old home which stood between Bob's and the Kittery Trading Post. Helen Kraft has long since departed.
-  **1999** – *Forbes* magazine names Bob's one of "The Forty Best Restaurants in the U.S."
-  **2002** – Michael and Bob's Organization Development Manager Eileen Conlon publish, "Lessons from the Hut" on progressive management practices at Bob's in "OD Practitioner" magazine. Later that year they present the concepts at the OD Network Annual Conference in Montreal CAN to enthusiastic response.
-  **2002** – Team from Bob's renovates and decorates local service provider Fairtides' transitional housing apartment. Later that year Bob's wins Governor's State of Maine Small Business of the Year Volunteerism Award.
-  **2003** – Robert "Bob" Kraft, beloved founder of Bob's Clam Hut, passes away.
-  **2004** – For years Lillian has insisted to Michael that her recipe for fried clams is superior to the one being used. Having previously resisted (being faithful to the original recipe he inherited), Michael finally decides to give "Lillian Clams" a try on the menu. Lillian receives \$.15 for every order of Lillian Clams she sells which leads to plenty of hijinks at the order window. Both preparation styles continue to be signature items on the menu today.
-  **2006** – Brother restaurant Robert's Maine Grill opens across the street from Bob's Clam Hut, allowing for a full-service dining experience for loyal fans to enjoy in addition to Bob's. Robert's offers an oyster bar, deck overlooking Spruce Creek, full bar and a more extensive menu.
-  **2008 & 2009** – Bob's is named "Best Clam Shack in New England" by *Boston* magazine's New England travel guide.
-  **2010** – Bob's is featured on the Food Network TV series *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives* with host Guy Fieri. Lillian is a prominent part in the show as Guy focuses on a comparison of the two clam cooking styles. Guy prefers Bob's style, but Guy's son Hunter chooses Lillian's, which garners him an onscreen hug from Lillian. Bob's adds new dish "Clams Two Ways" which allows all guests the chance to compare. While visiting, Guy Fieri complains that the stove area is not very professional. His producer reminds him the name of the show is *Diners, Drive-ins and DIVES*. Guy says, "Which one is this?" to which Michael replies, "It's a hut!"
-  **2011** – At Robert's great efforts have been made to be as "green" as possible. Staff wants Bob's to do the same. New recycling centers are added to help customers sort their trash into three different bins: one for trash, one for recyclables and one for compost. This is also a result of the partnership between Bob's Clam Hut and the Green Alliance, an organization dedicated to mentoring and advising businesses on sustainable choices.




 **2011** – After another successful summer the staff and managers at Bob's are again looking for a way to give back and appreciate their community. Bob's becomes the founding and presenting sponsor of the revived Kittery Block Party, an annual event held in the streets of Kittery Foreside feature crafts, games, food and entertainment—all proceeds benefitting local non-profits.

 **2011 & 2012** – Bob's Clam Hut wins NECN-TV's Best Clams award two years in a row earning 62% of votes from viewers.

 **2012** – Beloved "In-Window" cashier Lillian Mangos passes away.

**2012** – Mount Desert Island Ice Cream is added to the Bob's menu. Bob's Clam Hut is one of the few lucky restaurants to carry the artisanal ice cream.

**2012** – Bob's opens a satellite winter only location at Maine's largest ski mountain, the iconic Sugarloaf Mountain.

 **2014** – The Bob's team opens their 4<sup>th</sup> restaurant Lil's Café in Kittery Foreside, named after Lillian Mangos, serving fine scratch made pastries, exceptional coffee, espresso drinks and teas. Lil's rapidly becomes famous for their French crullers.



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