HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Includes the Bavarian Inn Restaurant, Bavarian Inn Lodge, and Frankenmuth River Place Shops

1800s

1846 Johann Zehnder Family came to Frankenmuth from Russtal, Germany, in 2nd group of colonists to arrive in Frankenmuth

1888 Union House built by Theodore Fischer as boarding house, renamed Fischer's Hotel

1900s

1929 The Zehndar Family established Zehnder's Restaurant

1930 Prohibition was a conflict in Frankenmuth and Fischer's & Zehnder's received the largest fine in all of the United States

1950 Zehnder Family purchased Fischer's Hotel

1959 Fischer's Hotel remodeled with Bavarian architecture and renamed "Bavarian Inn"

1959 Bavarian Room and Kaffee Haus were added inside the Bavarian Inn Restaurant

1959 1st Bavarian Festival (our grand opening)

1960 1st Dirndls (German costumes) worn by waitresses

1966 Expanded kitchen facilities from 2500 to 7000 square feet and added homemade ice cream machine

1967 50 foot Glockenspiel & 35-bell carillon built in Germany and installed here

1969 Renovated Main Street entrance and front porch into Bavarian architecture

1971 Bavarian Inn Restaurant was the second to recieve a hard liqueur license in Frankenmuth

1972 Zwiebelturm (onion tower) put on Bavarian Inn Restaurant

1973 Fischer Platz (outdoor biergarten) opened

1974 Alpine Room Grand Opening

1975 Expansion of the Bavarian Inn Restaurant kitchen to add meat and bakery production areas of kitchen

1978 Main Street entrance and lobby remodeled

1980 "Holz-Brücke" Covered Bridge Grand Opening

1981 Covered Bridge Leather and Gift Shop on Main Street was established

1982 Edelweiss Room Grand Opening & 3 story addition to add retail and lobby space

1986 Groundbreaking at the Bavarian Inn Lodge

1986 Bavarian Inn Lodge Phase I opened (100 rooms)

1987 Doll & Toy Factory and Roof Garten are added

1988 Bavarian Inn Restaurant 100th Anniversary

1988 Frankenmuth Gift Shops Inc. is established

1989 Bavarian Inn Lodge Phase II (198 total rooms)

1989 Freeway Fritz (in Bridgeport) opened

1991 Swiss Rooms Grand Opening & Bavarian Room remodeled with Grimm Brothers fairy tale theme (can now seat 1,200 guests total in add dining rooms) at the Bavarian Inn Restaurant

1992 Purchased Heileman Brewery property and building

1993 Bavarian Inn Zehnder family purchases the Frankenmuth Motel and built a Peacock exhibit at the Bavarian Inn Lodge

1994 Bavarian Inn Lodge Phase III (354 total rooms, 3 pools, family fun center, mini-golf)

1998 Bavarian Inn Lodge Phase IV (convention center)

1999 Bavarian Inn Lodge Phase V (360 total rooms, 5 pools, fun center expanded)

2000s

2000 Castle Shops Grand Opening

2001 River Place opens in former Heielman brewery location

2001 All restaurant dining rooms are 'non-smoking'

2005 River Place renovated

2006 May 23, 2006 beloved Founder and Patriarch of Bavarian Inn Cooporation, William "Tiny" Zehnder Jr. passes at age 87

2007 Logs & Dogs Annual Event becomes Frankenmuth Dog Bowl

2008 The Fischer Platz relocates to its current location south of the Bavarian Inn Restaurant to provide a larger entertaining area

2011 Frankenmuth Gift Shops inc. operates 9 stores

2012 Bavarian Inn Lodge expands the Family Fun Center by adding two waterslides with 35,000 sq. ft. of family fun space

2013 Bavarian Inn Restaurant celebrates its 125th Anniversery

2014 Michigan on Main Bar & Grill opens inside of the Bavarian Inn Restaurant

2015 Bavarian Inn Bleachers (a mobile bleacher rental company) is established

2017 Cheese Trap Food Truck was established

2018 Bavarian Inn Cluck Truck Food Truck was established

2018 Frank's Muth retail store opens on Main Street

2020 COVID Pandemic

2021 Frank's Muth renovations completed (first full service bar inside a retail store in Frankenmuth)

2021 The ResidenZ at the Bavarian Inn opens (a vacation estate home rental)

2022 Bavarian Inn Lodge breaks ground on waterpark and family fun center expansion to be the largest indoor waterpark and family entertainment center in the state of Michigan

2023 Renovation completed at the Covered Bridge Shop, which includes a full service bar

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2023 A new corporate logo and refreshed Bavarian Inn Lodge & Restaurant logos are created, establishing a new era of branding

2023 The new Family Fun Center opened, featuring Laser Tag, Emilie's Eis, Treasure Haus, and expanded arcade & redemption games.

2024 The Family Fun Center expanded with the addition of a Ropes Course, Climbing Walls, and Build-A-Bear Workshop®

2025 Bavarian Blast® Waterpark opens as Michigan's BIGGEST Indoor Waterpark & Family Fun Center

2026 Rau's Country Store is now part of Frankenmuth Gift Shop, Inc.

2026 Lilly Pulitzer is now part of the Royal Gift Shop

HISTORICAL STORY

From humble beginings to now.

Bavarian Inn Restaurant was founded as the Union House Hotel in 1888 by Theodore Fischer and renamed "Fischer's Hotel." His family continued the business for the next two generations. It was Theodore's son, Herman and wife, Lydia, who are credited with first promoting "Frankenmuth all-you-can-eat family style chicken dinners." The couple passed their popular Fischer's Hotel to their son, Elmer, in 1941.

1888

The William & Emilie (Bickel) Zehnder, Sr. Family has been operating Zehnder's Restaurant since 1928. Son, William Jr, whom everyone called "Tiny", worked as a farmer. He would stop at Fischer's to pick up garbage to feed the hogs on his farm. He inquired about the possibility of the Zehnder family purchasing Fischer's. After a terribly snowy Thanksgiving Day left Elmer Fischer stuck with an oversupply of food and frustration, Elmer was ready to talk. To compound the problem, Zehnder's had just completed an addition and it was impossible to overlook the long lines of guests who eagerly waited outside to be served there. Elmer had two alternatives—sell or expand. The sale to the Zehnder family was finalized February 4, 1950.

c. 1950

Tiny left farming, and he and his young wife, Dorothy (a former waitress at Fischer's) became the managers of the new business. Almost immediately they modernized the kitchen, installed dishwashing equipment, built a laundry, and improved the building design. Despite all the improvements, the Zehnder family's recipe for success went flat. The restaurant lost money in 1956 & 1957. With the country in the midst of a recession, there was talk about closing the restaurant. After many debates, the family made a courageous decision—to expand Fischer's, not close it.

The expansion gave the restaurant a new viable focus, one that instilled ethnic pride. The new addition boasted an authentic Bavarian exterior— stucco walls, woodcarving, flower boxes and other German accents were blended with the new German entrees served by "Bavarian" costumed servers. A weeklong celebration with German entertainment was held in 1959 which today is known as the Frankenmuth Bavarian Festival.

Almost non-stop remodeling and expansion occurred transforming the interior and exterior of the building to the Bavarian theme. In 1967 the stunning 50-foot Glockenspiel was added, topped off with a 35-bell carillon. It became an instant Bavarian Inn landmark with its revolving figures that depict the legend of the Pied Piper of Hameln.

Many Frankenmuth community leaders and residents considered Tiny Zehnder the driving force behind the transformation of their rural agricultural community into "Michigan's Little Bavaria". He spent nearly 50 years of his life assisting and encouraging other Frankenmuth businesses to either build or remodel their buildings in the Bavarian style. Due to poor health, Tiny resigned from active management of the Bavarian Inn Restaurant in 2004. He remained Chairman of the Board of Bavarian Inn, Inc. until his death May 23, 2006.

1959

Dorothy Zehnder celebrated her 85th birthday on December 1, 2006. Since purchasing the restaurant in 1950, she has routinely worked six days and 60 hours per week. Her motto is "if you don't feel well, go to work and pretty soon you'll feel better".

She has personally developed most of the recipes used in the restaurant and has taught thousands of employees the correct method to prepare all of the food that is served in the twelve dining rooms that seat 1200 guests. Her mother, Hedwig Hecht, is credited with passing on her German cooking and baking talents.

Always paying attention to detail, Dorothy's work ethic has been an inspiration to several generations of workers who have worked side-by-side with her over the years. She has helped to train many young employees who had their first job at Bavarian Inn. Some return each year and ask for her.

Four generations of the Bavarian Inn Zehnder family now are actively involved in the day-to-day operations of the restaurant. Dorothy is joined by son William (Bill) who currently serves as the Chairman of the Board, his wife Karen, and daughters Amy and Katie. Amy currently serves as the President of the Bavarian Inn Restaurant while Katie is the President of Frankenmuth Gift Shops Inc.

Tiny & Dorothy's daughter, Judy Zehnder Keller was the founder of the Bavarian Inn Lodge. Judy's son, Michael Keller Zehnder currently serves as the President of the Lodge while her daughter, Martha Zehnder Kaczynski serves as the Vice President.

FOOD QUANTITIES

Food amounts used annually in our dining room and retail stores

- **562,500** pounds of Golden Brown Chicken (approximately 205,500 chickens)
- **10,000** pounds of other meats and seafoods
- **25,000** heads of cabbage
- **250,000** pounds of potatoes
- **46,340** pounds of Blue Hubbard Squash
- **50,000** pounds of butter
- **9,375** gallons of ice cream
- **12,891** gallons of milk
- **24,091** shakers of Chicken Seasoning
- **80,000** pounds egg noodles
- **685,070** half barrels of beer
- **7,437** bottles of wine
- **45,428** mixed drinks
- **31,237** loaves of Stollen (fruit and nut bread)
- **4,325** loaves of Backofenbrot (white bread)
- **95,281** loaves of rye & other breads
- **4,530** homemade pies
- **13,226** flavored jams