



## MEET... TEAM McNEENEY MBII

**THE McNEENEYS (ALI, PHIL AND THEIR FAMILY) RUN THE OXFORD IN ROCHDALE, A FAMILY PUB AT THE FOOT OF THE PENNINES IN LANCASHIRE. TOGETHER, THEY CALL THEMSELVES TEAM McNEENEY, AN ENERGETIC, HARD-WORKING BAND OF PUB LOVERS WHO TOGETHER ARE CREATING A PHENOMENAL OFFER FOR THEIR CUSTOMERS. THE BII'S HANA RHODES MBII REPORTS**

**T**eam McNeeney is undoubtedly worth more than the sum of their parts, with each member of the family bringing their own strengths and skill sets to the business, creating stability and true teamwork to The Oxford in Rochdale.

Ali McNeeney MBII has been in the trade for 40 years and The Oxford is pub number 18 of her career. She leads as the host, manages the administration side of the business, but also uses her creativity in the pub's signs and décor. Describing husband Phil, Ali says: "Phil is the Gopher – he's behind the scenes but a real hands-on part of the business. He's our Operations Manager and builder."

Two of Ali and Phil's three children also form part of the team, with Tom and Ella sharing the responsibilities of kitchen and front-of-house management, as well as social media and marketing.

The Team McNeeney brand is their way of presenting their upbeat vibe, plenty of humour and connecting with their customers on a personal level, all while providing themselves a base for any future endeavours and expansions.

### Positivity and humour

Social Media is a huge part of the promotion of The Oxford, with siblings Tom and Ella managing each different platform individually, to maximise their engagement with their audiences.

Tom says: "The dry-humoured, sometimes cheeky comments we can get away with on *Twitter* to make people laugh often won't work on the much more local and community-led *Facebook* page, and our *Instagram* videos and photos don't translate to *Twitter* either."

Making the most of the strength of each platform means they can appeal to different types of customer, broadening the Team McNeeney reach with meaningful connections, which turn into return business.

Tom's advice when it comes to social media is to find a great competitor account, and really think about what they're doing and why it works.

"If you can see that a company like Hawksmoor is posting about roast dinners in its stories on a Sunday morning, it is doing it for a reason – to tantalise people to come in that day.

"We do this too, and we post about our really tasty and great value-for-money lunches, just before people might be sitting down for a simple



sandwich at home to tempt them in," says Tom.

Bringing personality into the service and atmosphere of the pub is crucial for the success of The Oxford, and Ali credits their whole team with the fact that they're dedicated, hardworking, and bring their energy to the wider pub family.

One such example is, when things get tough the team pull together to turn it around. "When nights go wrong (kitchen bottlenecks, etc), we just step up the hosting and perform a show. We're entertaining people for the evening and often find that those nights are when the tips are highest.

"People will stop seeing the pub as an escape if it isn't one, so we have to protect that and make it worth it to come out."

### Responding to rising costs

The Oxford has closed on a Monday and Tuesday for the last 18 months, having reopened with shorter opening hours after the pandemic. The benefits outweigh the losses for Team McNeeney, with Ali explaining that the whole team enjoy a five day week, as well as savings of almost 25% on energy and other costs.





Now, with the changing habits of their customers leading to earlier bookings, Ali and the team have made the decision to close earlier and call last orders at 10pm on a Friday and Saturday. They're still serving the same amount of covers, around 800-900 a week, but this decision means they're saving on heat, light and staff.

**Menu/GP/Food**

With no typical Head Chef in situ in The Oxford kitchen, the menu design falls to Tom and Ella and the kitchen team as a whole. Making changes only twice across the year means they can design the winter menu for warming, comfort food and the summer menu for speed, as the garden extends their 90 interior covers by another 120 outside.

Food trade is vital to The Oxford, and GP is worked out every Wednesday to ensure they're staying on top of their costs and maintaining profit margins at 70% GP.

Lately, the team have been seeing an increase in popularity of *small plates*, which they'll push throughout January, as *small plates* can be 50% of the size of a main meal, but 65% of the price - great for profit for the winter.

**Utilising staff's skills**

Just as the family make the most of their talents, so do they maximise those of their wider team. Tom explains about a pot washer they had who was brilliant at photography; so much so, he was better placed to teach them about food photography than being in the kitchen! To this day, Team McNeeney have never had to spend money on their product photography/social media images.

Next up for The Oxford and Team McNeeney is their 10-year anniversary this February.

They're planning a big party weekend to celebrate with live music and a couple of unique to the pub treats.

Their famous Cheese Pie, which Tom says is the best for miles around, is to be specially baked and gilded in gold leaf, paying homage to Salt Bae's gold plated steaks.

The humble Cheese Pie has almost exclusively topped the list of best sellers for them over the last few years, so to celebrate it in this way echoes the humour they're known for, and heroes their most successful product.

In addition to the gold pie taking centre stage, working the bar and kitchen over the 10th party weekend will be an *Allstars* cast of faces from The Oxford's past. Returning staff over the years of Team McNeeney will boost the special atmosphere and give a nostalgic draw for locals and loyal customers alike.

Ali and son Tom acknowledge that the service they provide is a huge part of the community in Rochdale, and hope to bring their Team McNeeney magic for many more years to come. We are in no doubt that this recipe of community, fun and teamwork will continue to bring them the success they deserve. ■

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**TOP FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS FROM THE OXFORD**

1. Use natural light!
2. Portrait for Instagram, Landscape for Facebook/Twitter/Web
3. Have a plain background, or use greenery/plants/herbs
4. Plan ahead and get seasonal content ready (like hot coffees, seasonal desserts etc)
5. Shoot from directly above the dish as well as across it