

Decarie landmark celebrates 50 years

Veteran restaurateur Peter Katsoudas revels in his accomplishments

By Mike Cohen
The Suburban

Peter Katsoudas was only seven years old when he arrived in Canada from Greece with his parents and two sisters, settling down in the Plateau area. Even back then, the present-day owner of the landmark Decarie Boulevard Rib 'N Reef, says he knew his future was in the culinary business.

"We had family members who owned restaurants," Katsoudas was saying last week at Rib 'N Reef, which is in the midst of 50th anniversary celebrations. "I got to hang out there and I liked it. While I attended school I worked at restaurants to earn some cash."

And so it would be for Katsoudas, as he completed his studies at Bancroft Elementary School and Rosemount High School. In fact, his plan was to enrol in university and study to become a lawyer. But one fateful visit to Palais Mina, a pizza parlor at Jean Talon and St. Michel, changed his life forever.

"I was 19 years old and when I went to make my order I asked the owners if they were willing to sell the business," Katsoudas says. "As I waited for the pizza to be ready, I started to negotiate. Now I had no money, but I negotiated for a price of \$16,000, including \$5,000 down. I raced home to tell my dad who wanted to know what happened to my wish to go to university. 'Dad,' I said. You are going to make the pizza dough and I will make the real dough. He loaned me \$2,500. A family member matched that and the rest was financed."

The venture was a success. Katsoudas sold it three years later. He subsequently established a restaurant in Laval and then took a gamble and purchased a dining establishment called Restaurant Lamarche, in the heart of the French speaking community.

"During the first 45 days I found out that the whole neighbourhood was boycotting the restaurant because of someone stressing that an 'anglo' had taken over this place known for its shepherd's pie and tortiere,

Katsoudas recalls. "I finally tracked this person down. I spoke to him in good French and told him how I was Greek, not an anglo. It cleared things up and in no time at all the place was booming."

Katsoudas' next stop was Duluth Avenue, just as it was becoming a hotbed for Greek Bring Your Own Wine establishments. In fact, he was one of the pioneers along with then city councillor Sid Stevens in having the cobblestone street established for



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Duluth. While his Restaurant La Terrace Duluth did well enough, there was too much of the same thing. Eventually he switched gears and converted the restaurant to an Italian eatery called Bellinis. Within six months it had a steady and loyal clientele.

In 1991, growing restless and looking for a new challenge, Katsoudas bought the Rib 'N Reef from David Stendell and Morty Fruchter.

Decarie Boulevard has been the home of many restaurants over the past half a century. From Pumperniks at one end to Piazza Tomasso, La Diligence, Bill Wong's and Miss Montreal at the others, a lot have come and gone. "For the first few years I owned the place I was changing four quarters for a dollar," he admits. "By 1997 the Decarie strip came alive again. Two years later I established financing, renovated the place and business really took shape. I never looked back."

Rib 'n Reef is known for serving the finest

grilled dry-aged meats, freshest fish and premium wines in Montreal. For the last nine years it has been rewarded with the Wine Spectator Excellence Award.

The place can accommodate 270 diners, including a private corporate room at the lower level by the wine cellar and a private cigar lounge at the top. The latter is equipped with a state-of-the-art air filtration system, satellite TV, full bar service and wireless Internet access. In the warmer months, guest can enjoy their meals in an elegant terrace.

While Katsoudas is generally on hand six days a week – he only recently started taking Saturday evenings off – he is backed by a team of managers, chefs and a full-time sommelier. This place oozes class, from the valet parking when you arrive to the way you are treated upon being seated in the exquisite dining room. Soft music plays in the background as you are served a basket of bread and breadsticks, with pickles and

coleslaw on the side. Salads are made for you at the table and servers act as a team to ensure all of your requests are met.

Steak, filet mignon and prime rib, imported from the United States and aged here, are generally the most popular items. But the lobster and fresh fish selections are well reviewed as well. We had the grilled octopus appetizer recently and not only was it tantalizing, but it could have been a meal on to itself.

As Katsoudas makes the rounds, he seems to know someone at every table. "We have regulars who have been coming here for many years," he says. "Some people we see two or three times a week. These are people who trust me and trust my staff."

Last week Katsoudas decided to twin his restaurant's 50th anniversary with that of the legendary James Bond movie franchise, also celebrating the same five decades of existence. For \$50, guests spent the entire evening enjoying hors-d'oeuvres dinatoire in the Cigar lounge. Katsoudas partnered up with Aston Martin Montreal no less.

So what does Katsoudas have planned next? In the next year he intends to expand his kitchen and build a new entrance, complete with a carport. As for the next generation, Katsoudas is only 59 and hopes to have many years left at the helm. His son Anthony has chosen a different route, that of real estate, to pursue as a career.

Rib 'n Reef is open for lunch, afternoon meals and dinner. Reservations are commended. Call 514 735-1601 or log on to www.ribnreef.com.



Peter Katsoudas banters with staff