

The Suburban

magazine

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MAGAZINE CONFIDENTIAL

By MIKE COHEN

Peter Morentzos is back in the saddle again The return of the 'Q'

Restaurateur Peter Morentzos is a man of vision. When he pulled his Queue de Cheval (www.queuedecheval.com) name and formula from the popular restaurant's original location at 1221 Boulevard René Lévesque almost three years ago, there was a method to his madness.

The Morentzos Restaurant Group (MRG) had a licensing agreement in place with the company that owned the Boulevard René Lévesque building. It concluded on June 30, 2012, at which time Morentzos set up shop around the corner at 1181 Avenue de la Montagne in the same quadrant near the Bell Centre. The owners of the land planned to construct a huge building next door, resulting in a couple of years of heavy construction, something that Morentzos felt would affect quality of service. He had hoped to complete extensive renovations at the new spot in a period of months and reopen in time to celebrate the "Q's" 15th anniversary. However, a lot of red tape was involved in sorting through a wide array of zoning and permit issues and Morentzos decided not to rush. He opened a temporary location the following summer for eight months at the Club 1234 Nightclub on the same street in order to properly celebrate 15 years in operation and then put everything on hold to work on the brand new facility.

Attempts to make believers of the dining public that the "Q" was alive and well at 1221 Boulevard René-Lévesque under the



Peter Morentzos in front of his new open kitchen.

The new "Q" has three private dining rooms, able to handle 30 to 120 people, and a cocktail area for up to 150 people. A terrace will open in the spring. I finally stepped inside the new venue last week and to say I was impressed is an absolute understatement. This place is a masterpiece. The last time I was there it was just an empty shell, with Morentzos pouring over architectural plans.

Dining at the "Q" remains not merely a meal, but an experience. The legendary shellfish platter remains an absolute must for starters from the raw bar: lobster claws, lobster tails, dungeness crab, shrimp and fresh bay scallops. The "Q" classics are headlined by lobster emerging, 2.5 to 4.5 pounds and de-shelled and other choices from drunken beef, rack of lamb chops, Mediterranean sea bass, yellow fin tuna and B.C. king salmon. The "Q" steak cuts consist of favorites like the 28 ounce porterhouse for

two (sliced), the petit mignon, the Kansas cut bone-in and the bone-in veal chop. There are about 20 side options, from superb garlic mashed potatoes to "Q" cut onion rings, oyster mushrooms, jumbo asparagus and creamy spinach. As for dessert, do not focus on the calorie count. Consider sharing a few of these to die for offerings: key lime pie, white chocolate cheese cake, shortcake, tiramisu, death by chocolate, millefeuille, crème brûlée, tipsy affogato (vanilla bean ice cream espresso/frangelico) or le parfait (fresh berries/vanilla bean ice cream/chocolate cake/mascarpone cream).

There is now a late night menu from 11:30 p.m., to 2 a.m. featuring special selections at reduced prices. Morentzos insists he is still in the soft launch phase for this

new edition. He managed to bring back 80 percent of his former staff, having spent close to \$5 million to turn the dream facility to a reality. The next generation is also part of this story. Morentzos' sons, Chris and Alex, are learning the business so they can one day step in and take over. "I have taken the old restaurant and refined it," he says.

What is the biggest change he has noticed in clientele over the past two decades? "Over 50 percent of our clients are woman," he says. "When I started out with the 'Q' in 1998 that number was at about five percent. We are not one of the more inexpensive places to come to. It just goes to show you how career-oriented woman are today."

Morentzos is behind the development of more than 50 restaurants, with the Queue de Cheval always serving as the flagship. Others included Moe's Deli and Bar, Weinstein and Gavino's and 40 West Steakhouse, just to name a few.

Morentzos had a very humbling beginning to the workforce, selling men's clothing and delivering pizza. "I always challenged myself," he says. "Even when times were tough, I worked hard to make my dreams come true."

Finally a short history lesson about the building Morentzos chose. Jefferson Davis, a 19th century U.S. senator best known as the president of the Confederate States of America during the Civil War, lived at this address for two years to fend off assassination. John Wilkes Booth, an American stage actor who assassinated President Abraham Lincoln, was also a guest here. He has plans in place to commemorate this.

PRESS BOX VISIT

The Montreal Canadiens are not the National Hockey League's foremost organization when it comes to dealing with the media for nothing. I was reminded of that fact last Saturday night, during my opportunity to view the contest from high above the action in the press box. I got to meet the Habs new play by play man Dan Robertson before the game. He and colour man Sergio Momesso were preparing for the TSN 690 broadcast. Robertson got the nod to succeed John Bartlett a week before the regular season began, so he had to leave his wife and kids behind in Halifax. They will join him here permanently after the school year ends. For now Robertson is calling NDG home, which brought a smile to the face of Momesso, who grew up in the area where his family still runs a popular restaurant.

STAR RISES FOR RUSNAK

When is a Montreal media outlet going to recognize the true talent of Jessica Rusnak and give her a full-time post? The beautiful 27 year old Pointe Claire resident has been covering the Habs for TSN 690 for a number of years now. Before TSN television lost regional rights to Rogers, she was doing

some on screen hosting as well. For a time this season she hosted The Two Minutes With feature of short interviews with Canadiens players. But when Macleans Magazine cancelled its sponsorship, that feature was abolished. On her present mandate, she says: "My duties are basically the same. That means attending all the Habs practices and games at home and related events. I have filled in as a co-host of the Habs post game show on a couple of occasions, which was a first for me. In February I will be heading to Prince George, BC for three weeks to be part of TSN's Canada Games coverage."



Jessica Rusnak

VETERAN BROADCASTER

Jim Bay, who at one time in his career was a radio icon in this city's sports scene, continues to cover pro sports for Sports Network USA as a Montreal correspondent. The towering Nuns Island resident figures he has now covered the Habs for 55 years.

BEGIN'S BOOK ON NEW YORK

I packed something extra for my recent trip to New York City, an interesting tour travel booklet in prominent French by journalist and broadcaster Esther Bégin called Carnet d'une flâneuse à New-York, mes meilleures adresses (Éditions La Presse), a compilation of her hot spots in NYC. The publication came about when Bégin's partner in life, John Parisella, was named Quebec's Delegate General in New York City in 2009.

This actually the second version of the book, the first having sold 11, 500 copies and the second 6,500. "So 18 000 copies in all," Bégin says proudly. "You have to keep in mind that in Quebec, 2,000 copies sold classifies as a bestseller. I believe the fact that I'm known in Quebec as a TV personality helped."

When Parisella was given the prestigious Big Apple appointment, Bégin greeted it with great enthusiasm and had no trouble finding freelance assignments. "Working on my books gave me the opportunity to satisfy each day my passion." She said. "I would go back to live in New York City tomorrow morning. I had the opportunity to write, report and comment about a wide variety of things, political and social topics, events, restaurants, new trends, exhibits and shows on Broadway. That was a good start for research!"



A look inside the new "Q."

name Douze Vingt-et-un Steakhouse & Cigar Bar did not seem to work. That locale was eventually shut down and revived as the Montreal locale for the Canadian Biermarkt chain.

Morentzos began to whet the appetites of his clients last summer with the opening of a seasonal back alley burger bar. Last September 10 the reboot of La Queue de Cheval Steakhouse was ready to roll. In the new locale Morentzos has recreated the signature open-exhibition kitchen, glass refrigerated meat lockers, opulent winding staircase, and massive round grill crowned by a dramatic 30 foot brass hood. The USDA prime beef is painstakingly dry aged in the restaurant's meat lockers for 30 to 45 days. Downstairs you will find the exquisite Angry Lobster Seafood Lounge.

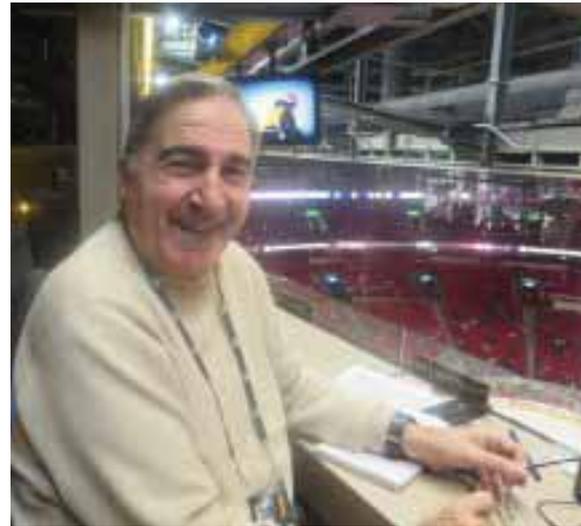


Sergio Momesso and Dan Robertson

the fact that all the new trends come from there and that in New York you have the feeling everything is possible. For Quebecers, a stay in New York is a good way to replenish energy, recharge batteries while having fun and great time.

BIG APPLE BITES

Since Parisella concluded his tour of duty in New York City, his post has been filled by no less than three people. Former PQ leader André Boisclair had a brief tour of duty before stepping down when the CAQ levelled certain allegations against him. He was replaced by Dominique Poirier, who stayed on for 10 months before returning home to become head of international relations for the City



Sergio Momesso and Dan Robertson

Bégin says she really started writing her book in September 2011. "Once I had established chapters division, I picked the addresses, revisited them and took pictures," she says. "I finished the first draft of Carnet d'une flâneuse à NYC on January 2012. Les Éditions La Presse and I revised the texts in February. The first edition was launched in March 2012. In all, it took me six months to write it as such. I took my Christmas vacation in January 2013 to visit New York and work on the second edition. I spent my February weekends working to finalize for a March launch.

I asked Bégin why she thinks Quebecers are so fascinated with the Apple? "Because it's the most wonderful city in the world and it's next door!" she responded. "More seriously, I believe Quebecers love the city because of its positive energy, its creativity,

of Montreal. Industrial psychologist Jean-Claude Lauzon now occupies the post...Montrealers Noah Bernamoff and Joel Tietolman are featured in Bégin's book for his Black Seed Bakery, considered New York City's first hybrid Montreal-New York bagel shop...Noted Nazi hunter Steve Rambam, a private investigator from New York City who came to Montreal a number of years ago with just a phone book and tracked down suspected Nazi war criminals in their homes, now hosts his own TV show on Discovery I.D. US called Nowhere To Hide. Work is now underway on an episode related to some of his work in Montreal and the crew was recently in to town to film it.

ROYAL VIC TEA

The Royal Victoria Hospital Auxiliary sponsored the hospital's last ever tea party

last week and more than 400 people were on hand, some preferring coffee mind you. This event has a long-standing tradition by their superiors and every day, up until about the 1960s, nurses would meet for tea at 3:30 pm to report on their work.

To celebrate the history of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC), this has been a Legacy Year before the new super hospital in NDG opens in April. Lachine's Marsha Hunter, a past president of the RVH Auxiliary and a 1962 graduate of the RVH School of Nursing, called the Tea & Treasures event bittersweet. "We welcomed past and present-day employees, retired physicians, nurses, researchers, staff, volunteers and patients to give them the chance to reminisce over this tradition," she said. "The feeling was upbeat. It is sad to say good-bye to the Vic, but time goes on. We

are moving to a new hospital which is probably the nicest of any in Canada. What I wouldn't do to be 20 years younger and get to work there."

Hunter says she will continue to volunteer for the Friends of the MUHC, the name given to an amalgamation of five hospital auxiliaries.

The Royal Victoria Hospital has enjoyed a long tradition of hosting tea parties. In fact, up until the 1960s nurses would meet at 3:30 pm every day for tea and it was at that time they would report the developments of the day to their superiors. In effect, it was a team meeting.

Have you got something to share? Email mcohen@thesuburban.com or call 514-484-9203, ext. 307. Follow me on Twitter @mikecohencsl and at <http://blog.thesuburban.com>



Esther Bégin and John Parisella on the Brooklyn Bridge