

Broken plates and a few tears signals end of an era at Jonathan's Restaurant



By Brock Weir

Shards of broken ceramics, moistened by a few tears, were the order of the day at Jonathan's Restaurant last week as friends and loyal patrons filled the Yonge Street eatery to bid adieu to long-time owner Mary Georgopoulos and her family.

The co-founder and long-time owner of Jonathan's called it a day last week after selling the business to new owners after 25 years in business. The restaurant was almost overflowing with long-time customers, dignitaries, as well as artists, business owners and community groups that have benefited from the restaurant's generosity over the past quarter century.

For those in attendance, Jonathan's ? and Mary ? provided not just a good meal, but a vital hub where the community was able to come together to support one another.

This was a message brought to the fore at Wednesday's gathering by former Newmarket-Aurora MPP Frank Klees.

?I am honoured to extend our gratitude and appreciation for your exemplary leadership as a business owner in the Town of Aurora, York Region and the Province of Ontario,? said Mr. Klees. ?In the tradition of your parents, who I had the pleasure of knowing, dear people, salt of the earth, our Province is better because of the immigration of people from across the globe to this great province of ours. None were better than Mary's parents.

?In the tradition of your parents, you not only personified 'warm, Greek hospitality' but in your footsteps you demonstrated generosity of spirit that has enriched many lives that you have touched. I am personally indebted to you and your family for your steadfast support and, above all, your friendship through my years of public service.?

Additional tributes rolled in from Councillor John Abel who, on behalf of Mayor Geoffrey Dawe and the rest of Council, spoke of the many people in the community who had been 'touched' by the restaurant and the family, particularly efforts around the Christmas and Holiday season to help families in need. A special tribute was also given to Mary by musician Patty McLaughlin who has been a lynchpin of the Jonathan's Song Circle, which has provided music to patrons most Tuesday nights for nine years running.

Following these remarks, however, it was time for the woman of the hour to have her say, and she underscored the flipside to most of these tributes, beginning with that given by Mr. Klees.

?On behalf of myself and my children, at a time when it was probably one of the darkest moments in our lives when my dad was very ill and he was stuck in a facility he didn't belong in, we tried every avenue, we pursued every government agency, and we were

at our wit's end. We called Frank?and within 30 minutes we got a call back and Frank brought a light to the end of the tunnel. You made something very wrong right and we will always be grateful for that.?

To long-time staff, many of whom have been at Jonathan's for well over a decade, she spoke of their own loyalty when things got rough.

?The first time we had a death in the family, we were broken up and didn't know left from right,? Mary explained. ?We decided to have a wake here in the restaurant and the staff came together, prepared the food, the Greek traditions, decorate the room, make sure the brandy was at the front, and they made sure every detail was taken care of. They held us with kid gloves when we really needed it and that is just one of the many, many times.

?At the end of the day, after so many hours that they toiled over, they refused to put in their hours and they worked that day for free. When we first came to Aurora, we didn't want to be a restaurant that was just about having a meal. We wanted to create memories, we wanted people to drive by and say, 'we had some great laughs here, we smashed a few plates there,' and maybe danced on a few tables and chairs. It happened because of the people in this room. We hope we have made a difference. We know we have enjoyed our time here and you have left us with so many memories we will always cherish.?