

Restaurants are a way of life for new owners of Jonathan's



By Brock Weir

After spending the majority of his 23 years working in the restaurant business, Thir Nava began charting a new course, studying accounting at Ryerson University ? but when a good opportunity presents itself, you have to know when to recognize it, he says.

Thir and his father recognized that very opportunity earlier this year when they heard Aurora's popular Jonathan's Restaurant was up for sale. As the long-time kitchen manager at the nearby Filly & Firkin restaurant, Thir's father was interested in securing an opportunity of his own. This past August, that dream became a reality when they formally took over the restaurant.

It wasn't, however, a decision they made lightly.

After getting to know former owner Mary Georgopolus, who founded the restaurant with her father, George, 25 years ago, they realised before they even closed the deal that they would have big shoes to fill. But, forging ahead, they believe they are more than up to the challenge.

?I had always seen Jonathan's on my way to the Filly, but I didn't really know much about it,? says Thir, an Oak Ridges resident. ?Now that I am here, I can see they have been involved in so many things. My first step is to keep things at their level but then to start branching off and doing more. When I first came here, I never realised the shoes I had to fill because Mary has done so much for the community, which the community has really appreciated. I really wanted to make sure I could at least do what they had done, keep it at that level, and then proceed from there.?

As Mary got the restaurant's new owners up to speed on the business, one initiative they are particularly keen to continue is the traditional community outreach dinner held at the restaurant at Christmas. They are also intent on keeping the formula that has served the restaurant well for a quarter century.

As the new owners hail from Sri Lanka, customers have continually asked when dishes, such as curries, will be added to the menu. On that front, you will have to take your chances.

?We're offering those as specials,? says Thir. ?Once you come in, you have to find that perfect balance. A lot of customers get comfortable with what they are used to and [change] can throw them off. I don't want to touch any of the menu right off the bat. When they are comfortable with us, then we will eventually add things to the menu. So far the people that have come in have responded well.?

Balance is also key to their lives outside the restaurant. As Thir prepares to turn 24 this month, he is in his final year of his accounting program and things can get a little bit hectic. Growing up in the restaurant business, however, has made him accustomed to working under pressure. It is a challenge he says he knows he can shoulder, but it veers towards the overwhelming on occasion.

While he tackles that challenge himself, the team at Jonathan's ? which comprises of his family and the team of chefs and wait staff that have become familiar faces at the eatery over the years ? want to make sure Aurora knows they are still open for business. They are also looking at ways to make their own mark on the local favourite while maintaining the atmosphere customers have come to appreciate.

?I would like to keep us open later on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays because I feel the location here on Yonge Street is a beautiful one for that,? he says. ?Aurora is very lively. I feel there are opportunities at both ends of the spectrum with the older and younger crowd. This is a very tight-knit community and I think Jonathan's is right in the middle of that bubble.

?I am not trying to make this into a pub, a club or a bar. That is not what I want, but I feel it will be a good place for people to come out and have a good time with karaoke and bands, stuff I love to do, and there is no age limits to that!?