

Yianni's closes in West; chef heads south



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By Mike Copeland

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When Aris and Kelly Galanis opened their Greek restaurant on Interstate 35 five years ago, they named it after their son, Yianni. Now, that same sense of family is prompting them to close Yianni's, located near the community of West, north of Waco.

"We wanted to see more of each other. What are we living for? Money?" Aris Galanis said of his emotional decision.

Aris and his son found themselves apart when Aris bought out the popular 1424 restaurant on Washington Avenue over the summer. While Aris prepared dishes in Waco, 21-year-old Yianni kept operating the restaurant 15 miles away that bears his name.

The demands of keeping 1424 and Yianni's afloat meant Yianni and his father rarely saw each other.

"We have been running Yianni's as a family, and it is tough when their father is not here," said Kelly Galanis, Yianni's mother.

"It looks like I'm going to have to cook at the house," joked Yianni, who's mulling his options for the future. He said business at Yianni's remained steady, but he missed being around his dad and the camaraderie of the family cooking together.

Aris bought 1424 from Bob O'Farrell, who opened the restaurant almost four years ago. It features an upscale menu in a casual setting, with guests able to choose such items as Seared Orange Roughy, Seared Scallops, Hawaiian Pork Tenderloin and Beef Wellington.

Under Aris' ownership, 1424 will add authentic Greek dishes, some offered as daily specials.

Chris Garman, who owns a local landscaping company, said he eats at Yianni's two or three times a month and hates to see it close.

"I love Greek food, and Aris is a fine chef and an excellent host," Garman said. "I know people who drive down from Dallas to eat at Yianni's because they do an exceptional job."

Phil Adkins, outgoing president of the Waco Restaurant Association, said losing a restaurant, especially an independent, bothers him.

"When you have a unique concept like Yianni's, whose food is different from anything else we have in Waco, the loss is bad for us in the industry and for the community," Adkins said.

Adkins said he's not familiar enough with Yianni's to comment on all reasons the Galanis family has for closing it.

"But I do think their choice of locations could have been better," he said. "It's nice to have a unique location, but there is a fine line between unique and inconvenient locations."

Adkins said he's encouraged to hear that 1424 will combine the best of what has made both restaurants popular.

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