

Liebhausers offer up a Slice of Heaven

By Rudd Hall

As summer arrives, restaurants up and down Narragansett Avenue begin to get busier and busier. One that seems to thrive year round is Slice of Heaven, where morning commuters and later day patrons can enjoy their breakfast or lunch under the shade of heavenly blue umbrellas.

Co-owners Steve and Maria Liebhauser have turned the "used to be" small bakery into a thriving restaurant complete with wine, cocktails, and a delicious dinner menu.

The business that Slice of Heaven now occupies has been around for years. It started originally under Eileen Larson, who primarily served a traditional coffee house menu of muffins, bagels, etc. After Larson, it changed hands twice, operating under different names, until the Liebhausers bought the business and returned the name back to the original "Slice of Heaven."

Steve Liebhauser started his culinary career as a student at Johnson & Wales University, later graduating from Providence College where his degree took him out of the kitchen and into the field of commercial banking. After years in the banking industry, he'd had enough, and moved to New York to pursue his passion for acting. That's where he

met Maria. After their acting days, the couple came to Rhode Island, where Steve worked at Vanderbilt Hall, and as a chef for a private family.

The couple's interest was piqued every time they drove by Slice of Heaven, both thinking that it was such a great location for a restaurant, not just a place to have your morning coffee. The building became available when he was working in Newport, so as Steve said, "we completely lost our minds and decided, lets take a crack at it, and now here we are, we celebrated seven years in April!"

But it's not business as usual at Slice of Heaven, because since they're co owners, as well as husband and wife, they share the heavy responsibility and run the restaurant in a unique way. "Winters can be hard, we'll pay our staff, and go without paying ourselves, that's happened many times. It makes it difficult, but we always bounce back. We're successful because we work really hard, we're here a lot."

As many in the local businesses know, Jamestown's economy fluctuates season to season, booming in the summer and not so much in the winter. But Steve and Maria are unique because they keep their full-time staff employed year round.

"I'm a good cook but a bad business man, I guess," Steve said, "These guys are loyal to us, so we treat them right. They've been with me since the beginning, and we suffer through winter together, but we hit the ground running once the summer comes."

"We can go on vacation and leave the restaurant in their hands, that's how comfortable we are with our staff," Steve added.

The menu at Slice of Heaven offers everything one could want for breakfast and lunch, with brunch on the weekends—from French toast to eggs benedict, or for the midday eaters, a chicken waldorf salad wrap, or if you just want some chowder, they've got that, too.

Slice of Heaven is now featuring their summer dinner menu which started Memorial Day and runs through Labor Day; with everything from fish to pasta to steak. A full bar is also available serving wine, beer, and cocktails, "you want to come in for margaritas on the porch, come in and we'll make it for you, we do it all, blended drinks, the works," Steve said.

Steve and Maria are especially proud of their gelato selection, in which they offer lemon, grapefruit, frutti di bosco, melon, cappuccino, and chocolate. "Shut your eyes, take a bite, and you'll feel like you're in Italy," Steve said.

"We try and keep it fun. Who wants to come into a place and see everyone down in the dumps? We like what we do for work and that's really important," but Steve admits, "I could never do it without her (Maria) no way, I just wouldn't last."

Slice of Heaven is open Monday through Thursday 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday and Saturday 6 to 9:30 p.m. for dinners, and Sunday 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. They are also available for catered events.



Steve Liebhauser in the kitchen of Slice of Heaven

Photo by Rudd Hall

Meeting

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Kaiser said, "that when our high school numbers are added in, the total district enrollment has declined far less, from 735 in 2002 to just under 700 projected for next year."

Kaiser explained that costs are rising everywhere in today's economy, the increasing cost of fuel, escalating health insurance costs, and town money that goes into the state pension fund; all these factors contribute to a budget increase. The other major increase is the cost of funding special education programs, Kaiser explained. "This is in fact a major problem in most school districts after the No Child Left Behind Act was passed," Kaiser said. This issue has been a point of contention between the Town Council and School Committee. Town Council member William Kelly later said, "We're not arguing against special education needs obviously, we have a very good special ed program and we should never curtail it or cut it, but, we should demand more equitable funding from the state."

Kaiser said, "Our long term

goal is both to bring some currently out placed students back to the district and to provide revenue by tuitioning in students from other towns."

The spending proposal was passed unanimously by the school committee and the voters followed suit with a majority "aye" vote.

Three annual housekeeping resolutions passed, but Resolution number 4, for improvement and expansion of the police station, met with the most "nay" votes of any resolution on the agenda. Town Administrator Bruce Keiser, later explained, "people are tired of spending money unless it's absolutely necessary." He said, for example \$100,000 of the \$400,000 of the money for the police station upgrade goes to the HVAC (heating, ventilation air-conditioning system) that isn't even working, so you can see their frustration." The resolution passed despite some negative votes.

Other resolutions that passed were Numbers 5 and 6, Expenditures from Undesignated Fund Balance, and Setting the Tax Rate, which jumped from \$7.81 per \$1,000 of assessed value to \$8.11—a 4.64 percent increase.




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