Seductive, volatile Sedona restaurant market continues into 2007

D’Lish Restaurant

by Sylvia Sommerville

New Owners at D’Lish

If it wasn’t for Nancy Samuels’ two hip replacements in 2006, she and her husband Rick Genstil may have stayed on as owners of D’Lish, the “very vegetarian, vegan” restaurant on Dry Creek Rd.

“It was our intention to own the restaurant for a very long time,” said Genstil. But it was just too much for Genstil to run the restaurant alone. Now Genstil has turned his sights to a sports beverage manufacturing venture.

New owners Richard and Agnes Hazen are thrilled to be in Sedona. “Sedona reached out and grabbed us,” said Richard, describing their love-at-first-sight reaction to the town they now call home. “We love the mountains. We love hiking and being outdoors.”

Richard believes it was fate that led him to the restaurant. He discovered D’Lish’s For Sale listing only six hours after it was posted on the Web.

The Hazens bring years of business experience with them, which includes owning a cafe in Waynesville, North Carolina.

“We took a dive coffee shop and turned it into a happening place,” Richard said. For many years Richard also traveled around the country as a captain for four and five-star restaurants.

They plan to expand the menu, adding more raw foods, and other contemporary vegan dishes, but keeping the base menu just as it is. Agnes enjoys making soups. Since the takeover in November, she has prepared at least 60 different soups and 40 different specials.

Richard said he hears stories every day about the beneficial effects of vegan fare. “People come in here to tell me how nutrition has changed their life, and I feel that D’Lish is here to support that. The original owners planted a seed and brought something to Sedona that is very special. We want to nurture that seed. We want it to grow and reach as many people as we can.”

“The Hazens look forward to bringing in more locals with special events, such as RSVP dinners on the restaurant’s patio during warmer weather. This will include poetry nights and live music.

“I know a lot of restaurants come and go in Sedona, but we are here to stay,” said Richard. “We have a nine-year lease.”

A New Family Restaurant

Sedona started the year with a new family eatery, JB’s Restaurant - in the Bashas’ Shopping Center. The small restaurant chain (half company-owned, half franchise) has made its reputation by offering hearty fare in generous portions, including all-you-can-eat breakfast and soup-and-salad buffets.

“We have a lot to choose from,” said managing partner Lela Mayo. “We offer larger portions and good value.” Often there is enough to pack up and take home.

The all-American menu features burgers, sandwiches, pastas, steaks, chicken, seafood, country platters (including pot roast, meatloaf and roasted turkey), salads, and signature desserts. Breakfast is served all day long.

To tailor the restaurant to the Sedona market, JB’s is giving the eatery an upscale spin. This will include more options on the buffets, fresh vegetables, a more comprehensive wine list, and a comfortable, low-key interior with a jazz theme in art and sculpture. Other amenities: senior discounts, kids-eat-free Wednesdays, and take out.

The restaurant, which occupies the site that formerly housed Denny’s Restaurant, will be the 22nd Arizona location for the company, which also has eateries in Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming.

“We’ve been looking to expand in Arizona, and the perfect opportunity opened up in Sedona,” said Sherry Egler-Raab, the company’s marketing director.

Award-winning barbecue

Hog Wild has brought award-winning barbecue to the “Y” (the intersection of 89A and Highway 179), to the site formerly occupied by Interlandi’s Restaurant. The no-frills restaurant, with playful graffiti on its door, fires up finger-licking-good fare, including ribs, burgers, a one-pound pork chop sandwich, and combo meals with pork, chicken, or shrimp.

Although independently owned by John and Kelly Walsh, the restaurant is an off shot of Hog Wild in Cottonwood, sharing many of the same recipes.

Restaurant Goodbyes

Two popular Sedona eateries shuttered their doors at the close of 2006. One wonders if they suffered from their off-the-beaten-track locations. The Sedona Racquet Club in the gated Foothills South community closed its Terrace Room, with its healthy gourmet food, including a juicy, mouth-watering vegetarian burger. Tamale Mama’s, on Coffee Pot Road, also closed.

The restaurant, which served a delicious South-of-the-Border menu, had a very successful run for many years in its storefront restaurant on 89A several years ago. The owners returned to a very changed marketplace last year, and unfortunately the restaurant never regained its market share.

Pottery Painting Returns

Also scheduled for a comeback is Imagine Art, the pottery-painting establishment that was a creative outlet for many children and adults in the Harkins Plaza in the late 1990s. Owner Henry Wingfield plans to reopen Imagine Art next month on Brewer Road, next to the Hummingbird House. The store expects to host parties, art events and workshops.