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OF CITY'S
BUSINESS
AND
SOCIAL
LANDSCAPE**

HAVERHILL TRADITIONS

PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo
Alan Boisvert in front of
his Keon's 105 Bistro, one
of Haverhill's most popular
restaurants.

The
**HAVERHILL
GAZETTE**

Thursday, January 22, 2015

Rows, pockets of restaurants help feed city's resurgence

Growing number of eateries boosts economy, social scene

By BILL CANTWELL
STAFF WRITER

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For generations, Haverhill has boasted popular places to eat.

Decades ago, people would flock to places like the old Capt'n Chris restaurant next to the Merrimack River to enjoy mouth-watering seafood.

They would go to the Roma restaurant in the heart of downtown for Italian cuisine.

They'd head to the old Bella Vista restaurant on Pilling Street, where families enjoyed a variety of meals.

Today, Capt'n Chris and the Bella Vista are long gone, victims of the wrecking ball and new development. The Roma moved years ago from the downtown to the Bradford side of the river.

The city's restaurant industry has changed, but remains popular. It has grown in a variety of ways, notably the "restaurant rows" that have emerged — one of them in the heart



The Barking Dog Alehouse staff includes, from left, Andrew Hagemeyer, Matt Celm, Matt Chase and Jeff Nahas.

SARA BROWN/Staff photo

of downtown and the other near the New Hampshire border.

A short walk to a variety of tastes

It's long been said that restaurants find their best success when they are

located near each other, giving customers plenty of choices of where to dine. Restaurant-goers like variety and tend to hop from one eatery to the next — trying one restaurant this week and another a block away

the next week.

Restaurants of all kinds are along Washington Street and nearby side streets in the western end of downtown. If you're looking for a top-shelf sit-down meal, you can find it at a place like Keon's Bistro 105. If you have a taste for a

burger, just stop into the Tap.

You can grab a spot at the counter of an old-fashioned diner like Mark's Deli for a quick bite. Or, if you're on the run, you can order a pizza or sub sandwich to go from Andino's or Subway. The list of eateries goes on and on. So does their variety.

Restaurants in this part of downtown have seen business boom partly due to the development of hundreds of apartments and condos in long-vacant shoe factories.

Spreading the success
The variety of eateries is making its way to the eastern end of downtown, too. Perhaps the most popular restaurant in that area is the A-1 Deli, which for decades has drawn crowds to its offerings of full-course meals and simple bites such as burgers and sandwiches.

If you've got a taste for Chinese, you can stop at Wang's Table. Barrett's Specialty Foods offers a variety of fancy deli sandwiches. The newest eatery to arrive in this Merrimack Street section of downtown is Beach

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Pizza, which offers the square slices with a unique taste that are popular at the seacoast.

City leaders said they expect more eateries to settle in the eastern end of downtown as the area follows the path of the Washington Street end. The Harbor Place complex and other nearby developments will bring a new breed of restaurant patrons, just as the apartments and condos did in the western end of downtown.

Harbor Place will bring a UMass Lowell satellite campus and several businesses to the site of the old Woolworth building. Neighboring buildings will be demolished, making way for dozens of new apartments.

When that happens, new businesses such as restaurants will settle into the area, looking to lure in the people who live, work and go to school at Harbor Place and other buildings, city leaders said.

The 'other' restaurant row

Haverhill's "other" restaurant row is along Route 125 near the Plaistow line. It offers variety too — sit-down family meals at places like Mr. Mike's restaurant, a variety of pizza and other meals



Marco Ribeiro lays out the dough for a large pizza at Beach Pizza.

SARA BROWN/Staff photo

at Uno Pizzeria & Grill, fast food at McDonald's and Taco Bell.

Location is what drives the success of this restaurant row. Eateries moved here because the main road funnels customer after customer to the area each day.

But the success of Haverhill's food industry is not limited to the city's restaurant rows. Other eateries that are isolated from their

competitors have strong followings.

The Roma on the Bradford side of the Merrimack River and Joseph's Trattoria in Ward Hill are among them. Seafood, Etc. sits alone next to Interstate 495 in the East Parish neighborhood, but enjoys great success offering meals featuring clams, scallops and other favorites from the ocean.

Then there are what might

be called "restaurant pockets" — places like Central Square in Bradford that boast a breakfast nook and popular roast beef shop.

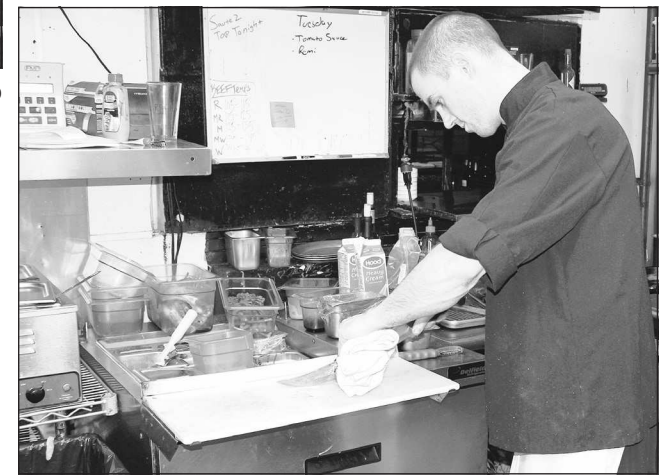
Whether the city's restaurants are in a row or a pocket or stand alone, they are enjoying the same success of the eateries of Haverhill's past.

They are indeed helping to feed the renaissance of Haverhill.



COURTESY PHOTO

During the good weather months, the Roma Restaurant in Bradford offers outdoor dining with views of the Merrimack River.



SARA BROWN/Staff photo

Chef Sean Demers cooks at Keon's.

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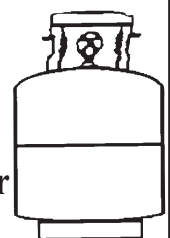
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Downtown 'restaurant row' lures crowds, is growing

By Mike LaBella
Staff Writer

City officials see Haverhill's downtown restaurant scene as a destination that will not only attract locals, but those from out of the area who are looking for a place that offers a variety of restaurants and cuisines.

The city is looking to expand the "restaurant row" to Merrimack Street, which will undergo a transformation sparked by the Harbor Place development featuring a UMass Lowell satellite campus.

Mayor James Fiorentini said the city's downtown restaurant row offers the "best dining north of the North End."

"Our goal is to have this carry over to Merrimack Street," said Fiorentini, who grew up working in the city's restaurant business.

His grandparents operated the old Roma Cafe, now the Roma Restaurant, for years. They sold it in the 1970s.

"I worked there when I was a kid and worked in other restaurants, too," Fiorentini said.



Alan Boisvert, owner of Keon's Bistro 105, enjoys a meal with his manager, Nereyda Garcia, at the restaurant on Washington Street.

PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photos

In the current downtown restaurant row, there are close to 20 downtown eateries along with several lounges that serve a busy daytime crowd and a growing nightlife. That nightlife is bolstered by an influx of residents who have moved into apartments and

condominiums in old shoe factories in recent years.

"That was part of the plan, which is why it's so important to have market rate housing that draws people with disposable income," Fiorentini said. "You want people living downtown who have disposable income so

they can ... dine there."

City officials said they expect more restaurants as Haverhill works to fill vacant street level properties.

The kinds of restaurants that attract people to the downtown range from pizza and soup and sandwich shops to full service eateries



A new addition to the menu at Keon's is "Duck Two Ways" – pan-seared Long Island duck served with fig and crackling jasmine rice, haricots vert and whole grain mustard sauce.

offering American and ethnic fare. Most of them are on Washington Street, while others are located on Washington, Wingate, Essex and Merrimack streets, and Railroad Square.

"We do have a variety of different cuisines, which gives us a nice, diverse restaurant district," said William Pillsbury, chief of economic development for the city. "Because of the diversity of offerings, people have a panoply of choices."

Pillsbury said there's a sense that Haverhill is on the move and good things are happening.

"Harbor Place is becoming a reality and UMass Lowell is going to be part of that, which is creating a

lot of excitement," he said. "We have the population and economic base to support a multiplicity of shops and restaurants in our downtown. And we have the public infrastructure in place, including parking, which is something we work on improving every day."

Pillsbury said a new focus is on keeping the downtown clean, well lit and safe through a partnership between the city and businesses that are taking a more active role.

"Is it ever perfect? No, but there is an increased effort to accomplish that," he said.

Fiorentini said police are on the downtown beat on weekends and there is a part-time cleaning person,

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just for downtown, who is paid for by the pay-for-parking plan.

"We also have a private cleaning company cleaning and plowing some of the parking lots," the mayor said.

Pillsbury said that with a \$70 million investment in the Harbor Place project, there's an opportunity for businesses to get involved.

"If you're going to open a new business, we want you to think about Haverhill," he said. "We have a population of 62,000 people they can draw on."

John Fahimian, owner of the Tap Restaurant and Brewing Company on Washington Street, said the ambiance of the area is a big attraction.

"It's a beautifully restored area and when people come down here they feel good. It's so historically well preserved," Fahimian said. "It's not the number of restaurants, it's the quality... with places like Keon's, and there is a great variety."

Fahimian said The Tap is a family restaurant offering good quality American food. It also produces and sells a variety of award-winning beers.

"I want to be here. This is where it's all happening



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

Jason Barnun, assistant brewmaster at the Tap restaurant, pours a pint of "Leather Lips."

as it's such as beautiful area," Fahimian said. "It's a great atmosphere here and if you're a new restaurant owner, this is where you want to be. What makes this area unique is that it's not a group of chain restaurants. It's all individual and family owned, which is pretty

unique." Alan Boisvert, owner of Keon's 105 Bistro on Washington Street, said many people prefer to dine where they have a lot of options in one area.

"If you know there's a variety to choose from with

different cuisines, it makes it easier to head to that area," Boisvert said.

"Even the bar scene has different age groups, whether it's the Chit Chat, Essex Street Grille, The Tap or Keon's," he said. "You have different atmospheres

that are all attractive and have good owners.

"We'd love to see more retail shops to round things out and fill empty spaces," Boisvert said. "Although we already have a lot of new salons, we just need one more niche-type business. I really think we're going in the right direction. The downtown was hit by the economy, but we are resilient and we will survive and grow."

Pillsbury said that in addition to newcomers, including Beach Pizza on Merrimack Street and Casa Blanca Mexican Restaurant in Washington Square, he expects even more restaurants to open in the area.

"Dave Andelman of 'The Phantom Gourmet' came to Haverhill early December at the mayor's invitation and walked around the downtown," Pillsbury said. "We showed him some of the locations, including the former Surplus Office Supply building and the former Haverhill Music Centre, where developers are looking to put in restaurants and are actively marketing those properties to restaurateurs.

"We also showed him the

former Trattoria Al Forno on Washington Street and the planned Harbor Place site on Merrimack Street, where there will definitely be an emphasis on restaurants," Pillsbury said. "The market will determine what kind. Our job is to create an opportunity, an environment for restaurants to open."

Fiorentini said he asked Andelman for advice on making the restaurant district better.

"He told us to make permitting easy, which we've been working on for the last few years," Fiorentini said. "I asked him to spread the word about Haverhill's restaurant scene."

Pillsbury said the city's plans are to extend restaurant row so it stretches between the Basiliere and Comeau bridges.

"This transformative development idea is how to connect Merrimack Street to Washington Street," Pillsbury said. "But we do have awesome places, such as the A1 Deli and Barrett's Specialty Foods on Merrimack Street. We want everyone to succeed. As people find Haverhill a destination, what will unfold before them is a full menu of dining options."

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'Dedicated to Haverhill'

City's longtime restaurants stay for the people, growth

BY SARA BROWN
STAFF WRITER

While new restaurants are settling in the city, several Haverhill eateries have stood the test of time.

One of those is Maria's Family Restaurant on Essex Street. Maria's has been serving Italian and Mediterranean food since 1989.

"We are a business dedicated to Haverhill," said Mike Middleton, operations manager for Maria's.

The Zefta family owns the restaurant.

One reason the family has decided to keep the business in Haverhill for so long is because of its strong roots in the community.

"We try to help out whatever organization we can," Middleton said. "We help out the Boys & Girls Club a lot. We host a lot of functions for them."

Maria's and its staff have seen big changes in Haverhill during the last 25 years.

"We have weathered the good, the bad and the ugly," Middleton said. "There's a lot of construction going on right now, a lot of change in the city."

Along with the restaurant, Maria's has a function hall. Maria's also sells its own pita chips at more than 100 grocery stores — many of them Market Baskets.

"Market Basket has been so great to us," Middleton said.

Middleton hopes Haverhill continues to benefit from its current economic boom.

"I look at a place like Newburyport and there is so much to do," he said. "They have so many restaurants and stores. I would like to see that sort of atmosphere in Haverhill. It's best for business."

Alan Boisvert, owner of Keon's Bistro 105, decided



Owner Jamal Zefta, left, and operation manager Mike Middleton at the bar of Maria's Family Restaurant.

SARA BROWN/Staff photos

to operate a restaurant in Haverhill because of the city's downtown scene.

"It's that old New England charm. I love the downtown area," Boisvert said. "I was born and raised here. I love it here."

He also loves the city's people.

"We have regulars and you start to know them and they become friends," he said. "The community here is very welcoming."

Boisvert describes his restaurant as "upscale American" with a "quaint cozy atmosphere." It has been on Washington Street for 10 years.

Much of Keon's success is due to the dedicated staff.

"We have much of the same staff that we did 10 years ago," Boisvert said. "We would be nowhere



Chef Sean Demers cooks up a popular dish at Keon's.



The Roma Restaurant offers fine dining.

Courtesy photo



SARA BROWN/Staff photo

Maria's Family Restaurant is decked out for its customers.

without them.”

Roma Restaurant on the other side of the river in Bradford also credits its success to its staff.

“Our loyal customers all know our staff and vice versa,” owner Steven Haginicolos said. “There is a family atmosphere here.”

The Roma has been a

favorite in the city for 15 years.

Customers seem to really love the \$9.99 special offered by the restaurant, Haginicolos said.

“I tried to get rid of it, but everyone wanted it back so now it stays,” he said with a laugh.



SARA BROWN/Staff photo

The rack of lamb is a favorite dish at Keon's.

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Traffic key to success of city's other 'restaurant row'

20 eateries offer variety on Route 125 near Plaistow line



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

Nick and Ida Katsoulis of Methuen in their newly opened restaurant, Jimmy K's, on Plaistow Road.

BY MIKE LABELLA
STAFF WRITER

It's a very busy area, which is why one local couple decided to open a restaurant along the Route 125 corridor, which is considered Haverhill's second "restaurant row."

This stretch of roadway encompasses a section of upper Main Street and Plaistow Road, ending at the Plaistow line. It has about 20 restaurants, ranging from take-out franchise businesses to sit down eateries. Variety is the key — and this area has it in abundance.

William Pillsbury, head of economic development and planning for the city, said the restaurants are just as busy as the area's heavy traffic flow.

"They seem to be doing very well," Pillsbury said. "Uno's Pizzeria upgraded and made some changes and so did Applebee's. And there's something new,

Jimmy K's Restaurant, which filled in a space and is an indication of the ever-evolving restaurant base.

"The draw to this area is the traffic count," he said. "A lot of chain type of restaurants decide on where they are going to locate based on the amount of traffic, which in that area is substantial."

There is the potential for more businesses to open, but there are only a few available parcels left, Pillsbury said.

"We had the Sonic opportunity that never went forward, but it was a corporate decision that had nothing to do with the site," Pillsbury said about where a Pizza Hut had operated for years and where a Sonic restaurant was looking to open before deciding against the move.

That same location caught the attention of Nick and Ida Katsoulis of

See **ROUTE 125**, Page S10

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New eateries lured to Haverhill by city's growth

Owners say they move here because of customer base, economy

BY SARA BROWN
STAFF WRITER

As the downtown scene in Haverhill continues to evolve, more and more restaurants are popping up in the city.

The Barking Dog Ale House on Washington Street is one of them. It opened two years ago.

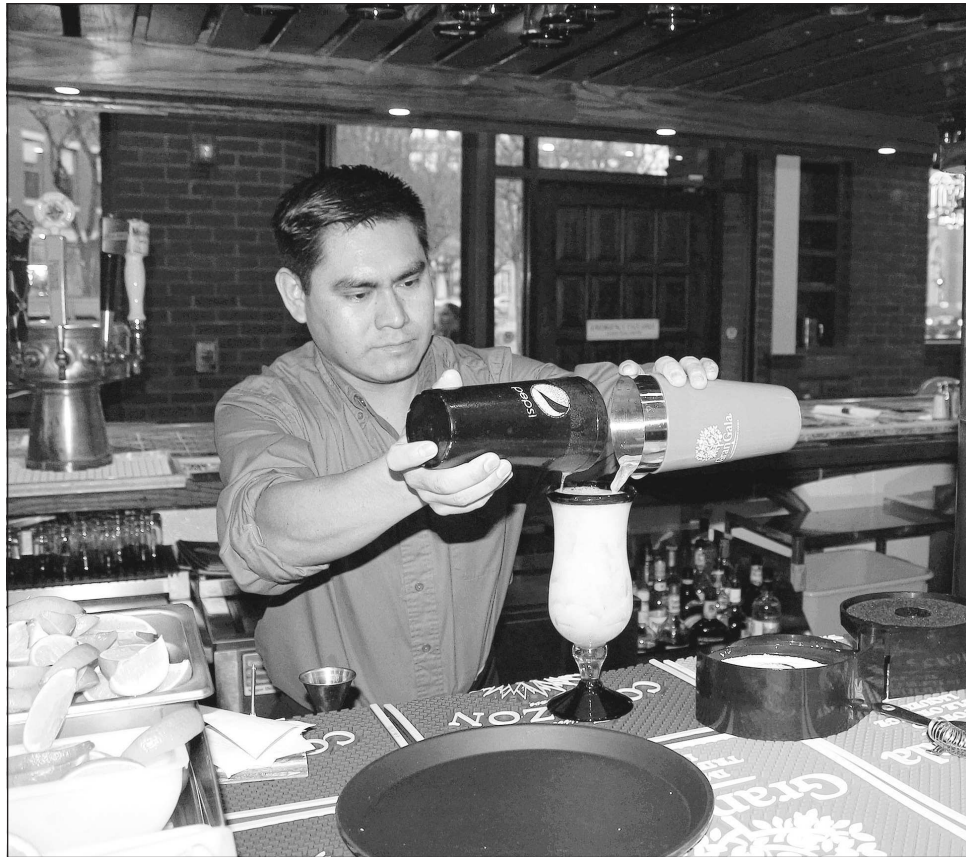
"It's been going phenomenally," owner Jeff Nahas said. "We couldn't ask for anything better."

The growth the city has seen is what attracted Nahas to open in Haverhill.

"Haverhill keeps getting better and better," he said. "There is so much happening right now.

"With the train right there, condos being built, it's a great spot to be at," he said. "We feel lucky to be here."

Nahas describes the Barking Dog as a great place to get comfort food and a good beer. He recommends the burgers.



A bartender at Casa Blanca restaurant makes a margarita.



Marco Ribeiro makes pizza at Beach Pizza on Merrimack Street.

SARA BROWN/Staff photos

See **GROWTH**, Page S10

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ROUTE 125

■ Continued from Page S8

Methuen. They previously operated Jimmy K's Restaurant in Georgetown Crossing until selling it last year, and prior to that ran the Methuen Family Restaurant for many years.

They knew northern Haverhill's Route 125 area well and saw it as an opportunity to open a restaurant closer to their home and to their long-time customers.

They opened their Jimmy K's, a family style eatery, on Nov. 24 on Route 125 at 101 Plaistow Road.

"I like that our location is set off from the main road so it offers good access, especially to senior citizens," Nick Katsoulis said.

He and his wife completely renovated the building and took out a long-term lease on it. They said that since opening, business has been "spectacular."

"We hit a home run with this location," Nick Katsoulis said. "Everyone in the city has been incredible to work with. Even our landlord is awesome. Haverhill really welcomes new businesses."

Ida Katsoulis is in charge of the dining area and her husband is the head cook. They offer daily specials and a variety of breakfast items, including a Polish breakfast with kielbasa, an Irish breakfast with corned beef and a Greek breakfast

with locanico, a Greek sausage. Their extensive lunch menu features wraps, club sandwiches, burgers and hot meals such as fresh fish, pot roast and signature salads.

"We're open from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m., but our big thing is breakfast," Nick Katsoulis said.

Other eateries in that busy area include Friendly's, McDonald's, Wendy's, Taco Bell and Burger King, as well as the Tuscan Pizza House, which opened more than two years ago. One relative newcomer is Jack Haffner's deli and market, which offers hot and cold subs, pizza, burgers and breakfast sandwiches.

And if that wasn't enough, there's also a Dunkin' Donuts and Heav'nly Donuts.

Full service restaurants and lounges include Mr. Mike's, which has long been part of the restaurant scene in the area, as well as Lucky Corner, Li's Asian Cuisine, LongHorn Steakhouse, Applebee's, Uno Chicago Grill and Grande Mexico, which is located on the Haverhill side of Stateline Plaza.

A few doors down from Grande Mexico is Steve's House of Pizza, which has been in operation since 1974 and has a large, faithful following.

"Competition is good and we're doing very well," said Bill Diamantakis, owner of Steve's House of Pizza. "We've done a little better every year since I bought it in 1999. We make everything with love and care and everything is fresh."



SARA BROWN/Staff photos

The bar at the Barking Dog Alehouse.

GROWTH

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"It's casual, but still delicious," he said.

The Barking Dog has three levels, each offering its own atmosphere. The third floor is function hall for larger parties, while the first floor is a bar. In the middle, there is seating for a more intimate feel.

"It's hard to describe this place," Nahas said. "We offer a little bit of everything."

Around the corner on Essex Street, the Casa Blanca Mexican restaurant opened up late last year to give its loyal customers what they were asking for.

"We had a lot of customers from Haverhill that would go to our other locations and always would say they want to see us in the city," said Jillian Canavan, director of marketing for the restaurant.

Casa Blanca also has locations in Andover and



Casa Blanca restaurant opened in Washington Square late last year.

North Andover.

"It just made sense to have one in Haverhill," Canavan said.

The restaurant opened shortly before Christmas.

Canavan said the restaurant prides itself on providing customers an atmosphere "where family

meets fiesta."

She said the building is a sight to behold.

"It's rustic and old worldly," she said of the old Whittier Hotel building, which has housed several other restaurants in the past. "It matches us perfectly. When I saw it for

the first time, I knew it was meant for us."

Canavan agreed with Nahas that Haverhill is an up-and-coming city.

"I think a community that comes together and helps improve the community just helps everyone grow," she said.



Happy New Year

from the Haverhill Gazette
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Function halls boost business for some restaurants

Events big and small give different twist to food industry

By SARA BROWN
STAFF WRITER

Function halls are flourishing in Haverhill — and also give restaurants other ways to generate income.

Some function halls are tucked away in restaurants and come alive when it's time for a wedding or other celebration.

For example, Maria's Family Restaurant on Essex Street, the Roma restaurant on Middlesex Street and the Phoenician restaurant at 12 Alpha St. can all accommodate functions. Other local businesses — including DiBurro's function facility at 887 Boston Road and Michael's Function Halls at 12 Alpha St. — specialize in hosting large groups.

One thing's for sure: If you're looking to hold an event for a large or small group, Haverhill has a place for it.

DiBurro's has been a part of the Haverhill community since 1922.

"We all grew up in Haverhill," owner Robert DiBurro said about why his extended family has stayed in the community for decades. "We are deeply rooted here."

DiBurro's hosts all kinds of events, from wedding receptions to large parties.

"We have a great atmosphere, great food and great service," DiBurro said. "You need those three to be successful."

He also credits being a family orientated business for the facility's success. Every night the facility is open, at least one member of the DiBurro family is working.

"We are very accessible. Whenever someone calls, you get one of us," DiBurro said. "You don't get an answering machine. It's instant contact. I think people like that."

DiBurro's once offered restaurant service, but ended it to focus on functions.

"It's what we do best," DiBurro said. "We can really transform the space into something beautiful."

Maria's Family Restaurant has the same family approach with its function hall. It is owned by the Zefta family.

"We have regulars that know everyone that works here," said Mike Middleton operations manager for Maria's. "It gives it that family environment that everyone is looking for."

Along with the restaurant, Maria's has a function hall in the same complex. The family saw the hall as an opportunity to expand the business.

"The restaurant business is changing," Middleton said. "You have to think of ways to reinvent yourself constantly."

"Years ago, there was a line out the door to get into the restaurant," he said. "It's not like that anymore. People can't go out and eat every night. This is a way to make more business for ourselves. We are really proud of it."

The function hall is in a former shoe factory. Customers can access the function hall from the restaurant.

"It's quite beautiful and historic. It really stands out," Middleton said. "It's taking the old and making it new."

The Roma restaurant in Bradford also has its own function hall.

"We do very well for ourselves," owner Steven Hagincolas said.

The hall hosts events from mercy meals to wedding receptions.

"We try to do everything with a family touch," Hagincolas said. "I think that keeps people coming back."



AMY SWEENEY/Staff photo

Patrick DiBurro stands with his son Robert at DiBurro's function facility. The family-owned business opened in 1922 and moved to its current location on Boston Road in 1965.



The function hall at Maria's Family Restaurant features a piano entertainment area.



DiBurro's function hall provides all the trimmings for a social occasion.

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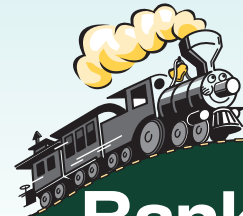


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