



Out of the ashes: The Longhouse Restaurant rises again

After kitchen fire forces closure for 16 months, popular eatery reopens

By Donna Lane

A longhouse is a narrow, timber or stone structure that dates to Neolithic times, intended to house several generations of an extended family. You'll find examples throughout Asia and Europe, and among the indigenous people of the Americas. Here in Gilroy, the Longhouse Restaurant is aptly named. Not only will you find generations of an extended family, the Maroudases, there, but at any given time of day, you'll find a wonderful cross-section of the city's community.

Danny Maroudas was 19 when he came to the U.S., with his uncle, Pete, who became his business partner. In 1977, they bought and took over The Longhouse, located at the corner of Monterey Road and Howson Street.

The phrases "family-owned and -operated," "family tradition," and



Photo by Marty Cheek

Danny Maroudas, who has owned and operated The Longhouse Restaurant since 1977, still cooks daily.

"family atmosphere" are some of the first Danny Maroudas utters in his soft, Greek accent as he begins to describe the business he has run for 41 years.

It's fitting that he puts the place in a familial context. He met his wife, Mary,

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For nearly 25 years, two Longhouse servers still bring food to the tables

By Donna Lane

A career waiting tables is often short. Standing all day, remembering orders, and hauling plates is exhausting. But Darlene Lawrence and Mirna Sevilla have been servers at the Longhouse Restaurant for 23 years, hired only a few days apart. After nearly a quarter century, they still enjoy coming to work.

"I can be myself here," Mirna says, her freckled cheeks lifting into a smile. "I'm seasoned, and a lot of people don't appreciate that. But I'm comfortable with my age and who I am, and so are my regular customers. When we reopened after the fire, I was a little scared, thinking I might have

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School shootings should be a rallying cry that unites us

I was a senior at Live Oak High School on September 11, 2001. Like many of you, I remember that day vividly. I



Caitlin Robinett Jachimowicz

remember the look on Dad's face as we watched the news together as United Airlines Flight 175 hit the southern tower at the World Trade Center. I remember the teachers who tried to stay strong

for us. And I remember that someone draped American flags on the overpasses in Morgan Hill.

For that all too brief time, we were united as a country. No matter how flawed our response in retrospect, we came together. We grieved together and wanted

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Nonprofit has been saving cats, kittens for 25 years

Town Cats carries on work after the death of founder

By Marty Cheek

For more than 25 years, thousands of feline friends in the South Valley who might have been euthanized have found loving homes thanks to the efforts of Town Cats of Morgan Hill. The group is planning a fundraiser where local residents will have a chance to meet famed cat behaviorist Jackson Galaxy, star of the hit show "My Cat From Hell."

The nonprofit, no kill, organization was started by Rosi and Albert Mirko in



Karie Tanabe brought boxes of donated supplies to the nonprofit Town Cats of Morgan Hill facility. Town Cats rescues homeless, abandoned and feral cats then finds forever families for them. Tanabe couldn't help herself and picked up little Jimi Hendrix for the photo.

Photo courtesy Town Cats of Morgan Hill

1997 and supports the community members and cats of Morgan Hill, Gilroy and greater Santa Clara County, said Samantha Sullivan,

operations manager for Town Cats of Morgan Hill. "Rosi worked tirelessly to save countless lives and inspiring others to do the

same," she said. "Under her guidance, Town Cats became an integral part

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LONGHOUSE - Iconic Gilroy eatery returns after a major remodel following 2016 fire

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there. She was working as a waitress when he bought the restaurant. His brother, Petros, was a fixture in the Longhouse kitchen, cooking seven days a week. His youngest daughter, Tina, fulfills management duties. Uncle Pete is still around. But there's another kind of family here: their customers.

"We value our customers," Danny says, "because they're our No. 1 priority above anything else. The biggest lesson I've learned in 41 years is to listen and pay attention. If something's not right, I appreciate it when a customer brings it to our attention. It's an opportunity to improve. In the restaurant business, the customer is the one that makes you and the one that breaks you."

Sometimes, though, what might break you is unexpected.

In March 2016, Danny's beloved brother, Petros, lost a brief but difficult battle with cancer. Then on an early July morning, a devastating fire swept through the kitchen, nearly destroying the restaurant. Fortunately, due to the pre-dawn hour, no one was injured. The sprinkler system contained most of the damage to the kitchen. But with so much smoke and water damage, it was clear they'd need to tear things down and begin anew.

Given the sequence of events, it would've been

easy for the Maroudases to seek an early retirement, say thanks for the memories, and walk away.

But that's not who they are.

This is a family that cherishes tradition, hard work, and above all, service to their customers. What's more, they had many employees who were suddenly left without a job. Rather than give up, the Maroudases chose to rebuild.

"This is all he knows," Tina says admiringly of her father. "In some ways, the fire was a blessing in disguise, because it was an opportunity to start fresh."

The Longhouse was closed for 16 months for renovations, but when they reopened in January 2018, regulars were pleased to see that although the décor was a little fresher, not much had changed. Tina says they still feel the presence of her uncle, Petros, whose son also works there. Everything is still made to order. They use the same time-honored cooking techniques and offer different daily specials.

Tina estimates that 90 percent of the menu is made fresh each day. They cut their own steaks, roast their own turkey and beef daily, grind their own meat and make their own hamburger patties. They also make their own salad dressing, whip their own butter, make their own syrup ... the list is endless.

"He's the hardest working man," Tina says of Danny. "He's here every day, often from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m."

Details

What: The Longhouse Restaurant

Location: 8195 Monterey Road

Contact: (408) 842-7664

Hours: 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., daily

"I don't mind," Danny shrugs, smiling. "I enjoy it. And I feel bad when I'm not here and people ask about me."

Meanwhile, the Longhouse continues to offer a varied selection of breakfast, lunch, and dinner items. People rave about their pancakes, omelets, Eggs Benedict, burgers, ribeye steak sandwiches, pork chops, and fried chicken. From meat, seafood, and pasta dishes to salads, vegetarian fare, and high-protein options, there's something for everyone. So, it's no wonder that you'll find so many Gilroy residents and visitors here.

They've also got a full bar and have live music every Friday and Saturday night. Plus, there's a patio, as well as a banquet room that seats 80 and can open to the bar if someone wants to schedule a large event.

The ancient longhouse was communal, filled with a spirit of family and an atmosphere of tradition. After 41 years, the Longhouse Restaurant still lives up to that name.

TOWN CATS - Group helps feline friends

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of the Feral Freedom program where thousands of community cats annually are spayed/neutered and released to live out their lives. Our organization has rescued and adopted thousands of cats into loving families.

Rosi died in 2013 and volunteers vowed to carry on her legacy with a mission is to alleviate the suffering of stray, abandoned, unwanted and feral cats in Santa Clara County and serve as advocates for all cats.

"We accomplish this mission through educating the public, finding permanent, safe and loving homes for homeless cats and kittens in our care, and providing food, supplies and support to foster parents, and low-income cat guardians," she said.

Town Cats volunteers pull cats from municipal shelters on a weekly basis, said Heather Dotto, Town Cats board president. By rescuing these cats, they free up space in municipal shelters which allows them to save more cats.

"We also provide resources during kitten season to residents who find kittens and do not know what to do," said Danielle Carr, shelter manager. "We can help them care for them individually, or by becoming a foster for our organization. If this is not possible, we work to find another foster family for the kittens to be cared for until they are fixed."

South Valley residents can adopt from Town Cats through a number of ways. Their main shelter is located at 195 San Pedro Ave, Bldg C, Unit 12-13, Morgan Hill. It's open from noon to 4 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

The organization offers cats of all ages and personalities, so there is sure to be one for any family. The adoption fees cover the costs of providing spay/neuter, microchipping, vaccinations, and flea preventative and deworming medication. Foster families also work to adopt the cats or kittens in their care. Potential adopters can meet the cats in the foster home or visit them at one

Details

What: Jackson Galaxy Fund-raiser

When: 3 p.m. March 24

Where: StarBrite Theater, 1770 W. Campbell Ave., Campbell

Tickets: www.towncats.org

of Town Cat's adoption fairs. A foster coordinator will work to schedule the best way for both to meet up.

"Fostering is a wonderful way to support our organization, and we are recruiting new fosters as kitten season is right around the corner," Sullivan said.

The nonprofit is a private shelter that relies 100 percent on donations from the public to operate. Additionally, the nonprofit can always use supplies ranging from towels, blankets, KMR milk, toys, and other needs. Check out its Amazon Wishlist for items needed.

Town Cat's Jackson Galaxy fundraising show is sure to be a big attraction to South Valley cat lovers. There will be a pre-show cocktail hour for VIP and deluxe ticket holders. The VIP passes include the pre-show cocktail hour, priority seating and a special meet-and-greet with the Animal Planet star after the show. All proceeds from the event benefit the cats and kittens of Town Cats.

What drives the volunteers at Town Cats is a love for these furry friends, Sullivan said. Although humans often must work to gain a cat's affection, once they have earned that trust, the animals are loyal friends until the end. Cats make wonderful companions, relieve stress and love their human friends unconditionally.

"I have been a cat person my entire life," Sullivan said. "I have worked all around the country with cats in shelters and veterinary clinics and I am passionate about helping homeless cats. It is heartbreaking to see pets in need, abandoned or homeless. Cats specifically are unique and fun with wonderful personalities."

SERVERS - The Longhouse's 'Odd Couple'

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From left, servers Mirna Sevilla and Darlene Lawrence with Longhouse manager Tina Smith.

Photo by Marty Cheek

forgotten how to do it. Then it felt like riding a bike."

Darlene also appreciates her customers, and the management. "And I love that it's a local place where everyone comes. You see lots of families. Kids grow up, people divorce, some pass on, but they become your family and friends."

Mirna calls Darlene the Felix Unger to her Oscar Madison. Demonstrating how differently the two arrange the salt and pepper shakers, Mirna says, "We're like The Odd Couple."

Without hesitation, Darlene's eyes light up from behind her glasses and she pipes up from the end of the counter, "Yes, we are!"

Kidding aside, good veterans show rookies the ropes. Darlene notes, "Mirna took me under her wing when I was first hired." Some 23 years later, you'll usually find the pair working the weekday breakfast shift, where their experience is one of the best things on the menu.

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