

The ADVOCATE

Myrna's bistro comes to Greenwich

When Myrna Yanni opened her first restaurant, Myrna's Mediterranean Bistro on 866 E. Main St. in Stamford five years ago, she knew she eventually would like to open a restaurant in Greenwich.

"It was actually a good startup because I was introducing the cuisine casually. There were some people who didn't know what falafel was. We did corporate catering because it was in the heart of Stamford," said Yanni, 37, and a Norwalk resident.

Tomorrow, Yanni will open her second restaurant of the same name in Greenwich at 28 W. Putnam Ave., offering the same Lebanese cuisine for which she has become known, along with an expanded menu.

The new restaurant, with 2,000 square feet, offers a more sophisticated atmosphere than the Stamford location, but retains a "warm and cozy" feel, according to Yanni, a native of Lebanon. The new restaurant features decor and paintings that Yanni selected during trips to her homeland.

Yanni said there was a huge demand for her to open a restaurant in Greenwich because traffic on Interstate 95 was a problem for people who drove to Stamford to eat her Lebanese fare.

Having grown up in Greenwich, Yanni also wanted a chance to return home. She said she also believes the

new location will help her attract customers from Westchester County, N.Y.

It took about a year to find a home for her new restaurant and about eight months to prepare the space.

Myrna's menu will offer grilled lamb chops, cornish hens and seafood entrees that she doesn't offer in her Stamford restaurant. She also will offer classic staples such as hummus, tabouli, baba ghanouj and kibbe, a traditional dish with ground beef and bulgar wheat.

Appetizers start at about \$9, and her entrees are priced from \$22 to \$32. The restaurant also features a wine bar stocked with more than 125 Lebanese, Californian and French wines.

Yanni, a former "hedge fund girl for 15 years" who was a fund accountant with Lake Partners in Greenwich, has been training her staff for a month in preparation for the opening.

"The food sells itself, but I make sure the we have impeccable service and make people feel comfortable and at home," said

Bella Pasquino of Stamford eating at Myrna's and is happy Yanni is expanding.

"I think it's phenomenal. Fairfield County needs more of this. I will miss seeing her as much in Stamford, but I'll take a trip in Greenwich," Pasquino said.

"I'm a regular (at her Stamford location) and one of her biggest fans. I've been going since she opened. I'm a great lover of Middle Eastern food, I think she is the most authentic for flavor and seasonings."

Sharon Olson, president of Olson Communication Inc. of Chicago, said she believes that more people are enjoying Mediterranean cuisine for its healthy and fresh offerings.

Her research have revealed that because of their international travel, U.S. consumers like authentic, ethnic foods.

"There's a perception of freshness that's a real key driver for consumers. It's definitely a trend that tastes good and is healthful," Olson said.

Although she doubts there will be Lebanese restaurants on nearly every corner, Olson said there's room for ethnic restaurants to flourish.

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