

Branford's La Cuisine closing after 38 years

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Arnold Gold / Hearst Connecticut Media

La Cuisine Cafe on East Main Street in Branford will close June 12.

By Lisa Reisman

BRANFORD — Shock waves rippled through food lovers across the Shoreline with last week's announcement that La Cuisine, the East Main Street fixture that encompasses a cafe, market, and catering company, would be closing its doors on Friday, June 12.

Cheryl Andresen mourned the loss of the Asiago chicken cutlet. Diane Pappacoda lamented that the breakfast quiche served at the Branford Early Learning Center's Teacher Appreciation Week would

be no more. For Kathy Kessler, it was the creamy tomato soup she enjoyed with her daughters on special occasions.

Before all that, it was Patty's Revenge, said La Cuisine owner Brendan Bloom, who said that "lingering questions about COVID-19, the resulting business climate, and regulatory challenges" prompted the permanent closure.

"Beware," the New York Times wrote in 1983, of the "brownie-like creation wrapped around a Kahlua-flavored chocolate mousse," describing

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La Cuisine Cafe on East Main Street in Branford on June 7.

LA CUISINE

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it as “sinfully rich, fudgy and wonderful.”

The delectable abomination was named for Patty Bloom, the original owner, along with her husband Ben, of La Cuisine, which started in 1981 as a bakery in their Guilford cottage.

By the time Times reporter Patricia Brooks stopped in, the operation had moved to a cafe on Whitfield Street, offering such dishes as “a well-seasoned melange of tender lamb cubes spiked with a wisp of fresh coriander” — a bargain, she noted, at \$2.95.

There were also “cutting-edge retail goods like gourmet cheeses you might find at Zabars or Dean & DeLuca, but weren’t really around in Guilford in the 1980s,” said Bloom, who got his start washing dishes at the cafe when he was 10 for 25 cents an hour.

“I remember at a young age really loving the energy of the restaurant, the smell of the food, watching my dad cook, and seeing customers delighted at this new experience of a raspberry almond muffin.”

His father also “set a high standard,” said Bloom, who took over the business in 2015. “It was all about going above and beyond to deliver excellent food and service for his customers and the clients he was catering for.”

Word spread, it seems. By the 1990s, the Blooms had shifted their focus entirely to off-premise catering for weddings, parties, and fundraisers, moving to a warehouse-style kitchen space in Branford.

They served breakfast for 3,000 people on Wall Street when Martha Stewart’s IPO was announced in 1999 and a formal tea for Pope Benedict XVI and his entourage during his visit

to New York in 2008. They did backstage catering for a veritable Who’s Who in the music world, from the Rolling Stones to Jimmy Buffet, to Bruce Springsteen and Billy Joel.

They did it with a creative streak that was signature Ben Bloom, according to Catering Manager Tirina Scott, who joined the company in 2009.

“Ben had this vision,” she said. “He could go into a space and imagine what a magical event would look like, and then he would say ‘here’s how we’re going to make this work, and he’d walk you through it step by step.’”

Among the events over the years was the annual gala for AIDS Project New Haven, with La Cuisine preparing and donating food for the occasion year after year.

With a belief that “charity should be an integral part of any business plan,” Bloom said, the company regularly catered benefits for institutions like New London Children’s Museum, and participated in Taste of the Nation, which supports Share Our Strength’s effort to end childhood hunger, in addition to supporting numerous local causes.

The generosity didn’t end there.

“If there were leftovers, we would be running it either to Columbus House or the Branford Community Dining Room, depending on where we were,” Scott said. “It was always never waste, always find a way to give it back.”

That’s continued in the current crisis, according to CDR executive director Judith Barron.

“We’re celebrating our 35th year of service, and I think La Cuisine has been a supporter of CDR since we opened, but during the pandemic they’ve gone above and beyond if that’s possible,” she said.

The CDR was among the

beneficiaries of the One-for-One program during the months of April and May, which had La Cuisine donating one meal for every meal purchased by its customers to first responders, hospital workers, homebound seniors, the fire and police departments, and out-of-work service employees.

“Here we were trying to figure out how to meet the influx of new people, and they were right there worrying about us and not themselves,” Barron said.

For Bloom, who estimated La Cuisine donated almost 1,000 meals, that response was second nature, it seems.

“There are so many people who don’t have enough to eat or they’re not sure where their next meal is coming from, or they’ve been working a 20-hour shift without sitting down, and all of them need sustenance,” he said.

“We received so much support from the community over the years, and it was a small way to give back and make this crisis not just about us and our business but about something bigger.”

Bloom said his staff, many of whom have been with the company for years, was fully on-board with what turned out to be La Cuisine’s final charitable effort.

“Then again, we, and I’m including my wife [Christina Holmes], couldn’t have done any of this without them. They’re a big reason we’ve been able to carry on my parents’ legacy.”

Except, perhaps, for Patti’s Revenge. It hasn’t been on the menu for years. ▶ La Cuisine Cafe & Market, 750 East Main St. Branford, will have curbside pickup for lunch and dinner, as well as for prepared foods, through Friday, June 12. To order, call 203-488-7779. Gift cards are redeemable through June 12, except for online ordering.