

'OUR FAMILY TO YOURS'

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Branford institution Lynn's Deli to close after 41 years in business

By Lisa Reisman

BRANFORD — When she was 44, Ethel DeMuis told her husband that, with her 4 children in high school, she needed something to do. As it happened, there was a little dairy mart at 365 East Main St. available for \$15,000.

"He said 'I'll buy it for you,'" recalled Ethel's daughter Lynn DeMuis-Grady, the namesake of Lynn's Deli, the Branford institution which, after 41 years, is closing its doors on Feb. 28.

Capone's Pizza Bar will be relocating to the space this spring.

"Good idea," Ethel said to her husband. Not long after, she remarked that she might make a little sausage and pepper at the dairy mart, "see how it goes," said DeMuis-Grady.

The rest is history.

"My mother can make something out of nothing," said co-

owner Helen Borrelli, Lynn's older sister, the cook, and "my better half," as DeMuis-Grady put it. (DeMuis-Grady is the people person.) "Chicken cutlets, eggplant parm, lasagna, you name it. The line used to be out the door."

That was in 1978. Jimmy Carter was president. Shoreline residents were feeling the effects of the gas shortage. A black-and-white photo on the wall in the seating area shows a sign for odd-even rationing; if your license plate was odd, you could only get gas on odd-numbered days.

No matter. Soon, Matthew, known as Babe, closed his own business, Charlie's Tire on George Street in New Haven, and signed on.

"He said he had to come and help us," Helen, 61, said with a smile as Frank Sinatra crooned "My Way" through the bright,



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Lynn DeMuis-Grady, left, and sister Helen Borrelli, right, owners of Lynn's Restaurant and Deli in Branford on Feb. 13. The business is closing after 41-years. Below, DeMuis-Grady, with a customer.

homey space. "He'd be in at 4 a.m. and he'd say 'gals, you're late, the muffins are already in the oven.'"

On her retirement in 2003, Ethel sold the business to DeMuis-Grady and Borrelli. Around that time, they heard that a building was available on 318 East Main with 2,500 square feet, more than three times the space of the original deli.

"We thought we were the Jeffersons," said DeMuis-Grady, 54, of their relocation from 365 East Main, standing in front of a framed article by her son Chuck, a writer and musician. "We were moving on up." They put up a billboard announcing the move. That was the last advertising they would take out.

Evidently, it wasn't necessary.

"Lynn's is one of those word-of-mouth family-owned places that pride themselves on offering homemade food that they would serve to their own family," said Branford's Leighton Davis, who was ordering an Ethel's Sub with Lynn's turkey, roast beef, and ham on a recent afternoon.

"I'll remember them for their insane mac and cheese and for all they did year in and year out for the Branford Festival," said Shelly Johnson, referring to the all-hands-on-deck family affair, with



their kids, including Helen's son Nick, pitching in with a popular food booth and providing breakfast for the runners in the annual Sunday road race.

Then there was the casual, no-frills atmosphere.

"They were there to feed you, not impress you with lighting and stuffy napkin designs," said Michele Malerba, a regular. "They also quietly sent food to people who had a death in the family. Lynn and Helen are true Branford treasures."

Next-door neighbor Bob Decarlo of Deke's Solid Wood Furniture, who stopped in for a bite near closing time, agreed. "The food is superb, the soup is healthy and fabulous, and I'm in love with all the ladies," he said. "I will sorely miss this place and these people."

So, it seems, will DeMuis-Grady and Borrelli.

"This is my life," said DeMuis-Grady, amid the early photos of Ethel, Babe and the three sisters,

See Lynn's on B3



A portrait of Ethel DeMuis, founder of Lynn's Restaurant and Deli of Branford, in the restaurant.



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Lynn DeMuisis-Grady, second from left, and sister Helen Borrelli, right, owners of Lynn's Restaurant and Deli in Branford, joking with a customer on Feb. 13.

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including Roseann Pandolfi, at the original deli that people the walls. "This is my story."

This is where her daughter Nicole, who died in 2006 at 16, had her prom. "We had a band and a bubble machine and everyone dressed up," DeMuisis-Grady said.

This is where, more recently, a call came in for Borrelli's daughter Maria.

As it happened, Lynn's had catered an Easter celebration for attorney Ed Mar-

cus, among the adventures over the years that had them ferrying to functions on Potato Island in the Thimbles, and catering for the Rolling Stones and for the wedding of Laurie and Bill Van Wilgen.

"My daughter had mentioned to Ed Marcus that she was going to graduate from law school and then a week later he phoned the deli, looking for her," she said. Maria is in her third year as a tax lawyer at the firm.

This is where, above all, employees like Jona Moughty and Cheryl Velardi have been with them for

25 years, and plaques on the wall hang above the comfortable open tables where their customers sit.

All that said, "it's time," said DeMuisis-Grady, who plans to spend more time in her work as a realtor for Coldwell Banker in Branford.

"I come home and I'm so exhausted I can't do anything," she said. That's after years and years of making the muffins and preparing the cutlets at 5 a.m. Monday through Friday, and weekends consumed with the catering business.

"We feel so blessed to have served the Shoreline

for 41 years and to have met so many wonderful people along the way," Borrelli said, exhorting customers to stop in and say good-bye during the final week, where there'll be a celebration every day.

"This business has always been a family affair, and Helen and I have always tried to honor the standard set by our mother," said DeMuisis-Grady.

"Our family to yours, we can't thank you enough," Borelli said.

"We've loved cooking for you," DeMuisis-Grady chimed in with a tear in her eye.