



TAKING THE HEAT: Executive Chef Apolonio Mojarro takes the heat in the kitchen of downtown Greer restaurant Bistro 107 where he briefly sears a halibut steak to lock in the flavor before broiling it to serve to a waiting customer.

Bistro 107 alive and thriving

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Contrary to premature reports of its closing, the upscale Greer restaurant Bistro 107 is alive and well as owners Debra and Apolonio Mojarro look forward to a banner third year in business.

Although the past year has been especially difficult because of parking issues created by construction of the new city court/police building, "that is behind us and business is steadily

improving," Debra Mojarro said.

In fact, Bistro 107 has been just chosen as Greer's Best Restaurant by a new upstate magazine "G" and will be featured in the publication's June issue.

"First rate restaurants offering a fine dining quality, such as Bistro 107, Gerard's, Justin's and Bin 112, give a real identity to Greer Station," said Reno Deaton who heads the Greer Development Corp. "They are very important to the community."

Larry Wilson, chairman of the Part-

nership for Tomorrow, said Bistro 107 and other new restaurants have been vital to his organization's efforts to revitalize downtown Greer. "It took someone to break the ice, and Gerard's paved the way. Then came Bistro 107, and others which enhance our quality of life."

Opening their own restaurant was the dream of the Mojarro couple who discovered Greer after venturing from Florida. Apolonio Mojarro had been executive chef at the famed Ta-boo Restaurant in Palm Beach for 14 years.

During that time, he won state and national culinary honors at the restaurant that caters to celebrities from Celene Dion to Donald Trump.

"I brought the same menu - the same dishes with the same portions of food that I created - to Greer, and we are serving them at half the price they get at the Ta-boo", he said.

Despite spiraling food costs, Bistro 107 has not raised prices. Instead the Mojarros are offering added value by giving customers the choice of a soup

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or a salad with every entrée. "That alone is a \$5 value." Apolonio Mojarro said. "We serve nine chops in a rack of lamb (the most expensive item on the menu at \$28). We also have a number of items that are less than \$10, and inexpensive wines, so patrons can make their own ticket."

In the two years since Bistro 107 opened, the owners have tweaked the menu. "We started out with items from around the world and realized that we did not offer anything that could be considered local," Apolonio said, explaining the addition of shrimp 'n grits that includes a hint of bacon; a half-pound Angus beef burger, and a new lunch item, fried fish sandwiches.

CUSTOMERS' FAVORITES

Although steaks and salmon are the most popular entrées on the evening menu, Debra

Mojarro said, "We get the most calls from people asking about the soup of the day." Customers' favorites are tomato basil cream, chicken sausage gumbo with fresh okra and potato bacon.

As executive chef, Apolonio rotates about 20 varieties of soups that he prepares fresh daily.

But Mojarro's specialty is the variety of sauces that he makes each morning for nearly every entrée. It was his Bing cherry sauce, served with duck that attracted Debra.

"After tasting that sauce, I said, that's it. I am going to marry this man. But he still hasn't given me the recipe."

Owning the restaurant carries the obligation of working 107 hours a week - "that's how we got the name for this restaurant," joked Paulo.

His day begins at 9 a.m. "when I start baking bread and preparing the sauces and

things that take the longest time - along with the list of things I have written down the night before."

Then Apolonio cuts the meats delivered that morning, including fish, to menu size portions "so that we do not have leftovers. Everything is fresh - nothing we serve is frozen," he said.

"The aromas from the soup and the reduction process for the sauces is wonderful by the time I arrive at 10:30 a.m. in the mornings," Debra Mojarro said. She serves as hostess for the mid-day crowd before leaving at 2:30 p.m. "when mom duties start calling."

After serving lunch, Apolonio Mojarro and two assistant sous chefs start preparing for the dinner crowd. When the last customer has departed, Mojarro and his crew scrub the entire kitchen.

"He is fanatical about cleanliness," Debra Mojarro said of

her husband. "He has different carving and preparation areas in the kitchen for each type of meat that we serve, and our kitchen workers are required to wash their hands thoroughly at least every 15 minutes."

Once the restaurant is sparkling clean, Apolonio Mojarro's final task is making lists of food orders and things to prepare the next day. "I usually get home between 3-4 a.m.," he said. "But I love it. I wouldn't be doing anything else."

GREW UP IN THE INDUSTRY

Apolonio Mojarro grew up in a family that was engaged in the food service industry. "My grandfather was a butcher, and when I was six years old, he gave me a little knife. My job was to skin ox tails," he said.

Apolonio went on to attend a culinary school operated by

two uncles and began a career in food preparation as a sous chef at Ravislow Country Club in Chicago, Ill.

Mojarro's next stop was at Crestmont Country Club in New Jersey where he met his future bride, the former Debra Levy who was general manager of the club. "Apolonio made my lunch every day - I couldn't let him get away," she said.

That was in 1993. The Mojarros soon moved away from Florida where their children, Alexia, a freshman at Byrnes High, and Sebastian, who attends D.R. Hill Middle School, were born.

As executive chef, Apolonio Mojarro creates all of his soups, desserts and main course recipes from scratch. "I never copied another recipe, and I don't write mine down. That caused a problem when I left Florida - I had to stay six months longer than I planned at the Ta-boo to teach others

how to prepare everything I had created."

Construction of the new city court-police building eliminated numerous downtown spaces and made the past year difficult for the Mojarros. "Our business, and that of other restaurants, has been way off. But it is starting to pick up now, and parking is not a great problem, especially at night," Apolonio Mojarro said.

Mayor Rick Danner believes "we have adequate downtown parking - it is just a matter of educating visitors to the area. Anyone who goes to a restaurant in downtown Greenville or Spartanburg is prepared to walk a long way, but they like to park in front of the building in Greer. Every growing and dynamic city has parking issues, so it is going to take a change in attitude on the part of those visiting downtown Greer if our restaurants are to survive and prosper."