



Romilo's Restaurant

Paradissis Has Found Paradise in Severna Park

WRITTEN BY TEDDY DURGIN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLI MIX

Romilo's Restaurant in Severna Park will be celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. Chris Paradissis has owned the establishment for almost the past six years, continuing to serve the same Greek-Italian-American breakfasts, lunches, and dinners it has been known for from the get-go.

Lately, though, it's Romilo's bar that has been drawing in the locals. In a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*, Paradissis stated, "Many people didn't know we had a bar! Last April, we expanded [the space] and added new signage on the front

of the building, really highlighting that we have a bar. We offer the full variety of a liquor menu, mixed drinks, wines, and beers to both the dining room and bar area. We run Happy Hour seven days a week from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Our liquor sales are up over 200 percent in the last year based on the changes we've made, the renovation and expansion, and the increased promotion. It's been a huge boost."

In addition to the every-evening Happy Hour, Romilo's offers other promotions. For instance, Thursdays mean 50 percent off the price of bot-

tles of wine all day. There is also Trivia Night (every Wednesday) and live entertainment (Fridays and Saturdays) featuring bands that usually play oldies or soft rock hits.

According to Paradissis, "One of the things we worked with the liquor board in getting is a dancing license. That was a challenge. A lot of establishments in Severna Park don't have that. We have a large enough establishment on the bar side where we have a dance floor and a full band set-up. Romilo's is really a great place for people to come out and have drinks, great food, and live entertain-



Chris Paradissis
Owner / Operator
Romilo's Restaurant

restaurant, especially when it comes to advertising our special events.”

At the holidays, for instance, Romilo's packed 'em in with an Eat, Drink & Be Ugly Sweater Party. The contest featured prizes for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd places and was a lot of fun. “I love when I get feedback from customers about how much they enjoy our establishment,” Paradissis said. “We have customers who have been coming into this restaurant from the time it's been open. It's been a staple of Severna Park for three decades now. I also enjoy how our employees interact with our customers.”

The social aspect is one of the things he and his staff really missed during the COVID-19 crisis. Fortunately, Romilo's already had a successful carryout business in place when customers were suddenly forced to social distance and stay home. Paradissis declared, “We do carryout, DoorDash, Grubhub, and Uber Eats. Through the pandemic, that saved Romilo's. Also, based on

Maryland law, we were allowed to have [beverage alcohol] delivered. Our carryout has always been known. We do between 35 and 40 percent of our total business through carryout to this day. During the pandemic, it was much higher than that. Without that, we most likely wouldn't have made it.”

Paradissis came to the bar and restaurant business from the retail grocery industry. His prior professional credits included lengthy stints as a regional Vice President of Operations for Giant Food and Vice President of Operations & Store Merchandising for Natural Markets Food Group.

He remarked, “As in that business, it's true in restaurants and bars. The key to success is people. The biggest challenge has been finding good people. We're very selective about who we choose to hire at Romilo's. We hire friendly people who can really take care of our customers from a service standpoint.”

And from a management side, he

ment that you can literally dance to.”

He continued, “Customers love us because they don't have to drive to Annapolis. We're in the Robinson Crossing Shopping Center. We're a little bit hidden, but our customers like to describe us as a 'hidden jewel.' A lot of customers who come in for the first time say, 'Wow, we didn't know you were here!'”

As a result, marketing has been key to Romilo's growing beyond its core local clientele. Romilo's has a food truck that extends the brand beyond the restaurant's Ritchie Highway trappings. “Our food truck goes out to special events and into the various neighborhoods,” Paradissis said. “It features a limited menu, but we do serve our top drivers. It definitely gets the name out into the community.”

Paradissis and his staff also try and keep Romilo's visible on Facebook and other online platforms: “We're really trying to work on our exposure through marketing and social media. One of the challenges is we have an older clientele. Many of our customers are 40 years old and up. Some of them don't utilize social media. So, my best advertising is still word of mouth. But we still do a lot on Facebook and Instagram to promote the





stressed that one of the big keys to success is to take care of one's employees. "Take care of your people has been my motto for this restaurant. It was my motto for when I was Vice President of Operations for Giant Food for almost 15 years. It's all about people and good service and fresh foods. I can see it in my employees' faces when they come to work,

especially when there's live entertainment. They're enjoying themselves. They're enjoying the fun and the atmosphere. And when they're having fun, it can't help but reflect on the customers."

He added, "You have to have a passion for what you do. You have to love what you do. It's very important that you enjoy working with people.

If you don't have that passion and enjoyment, it's going to be very difficult for you to be successful."

The *Beverage Journal* had the benefit of sitting down with Paradissis near the end of one year and the beginning of another. While times aren't nearly as tough as 2020 going into 2021, the year ahead does pose its share of challenges. Paradissis concluded, "I am optimistic, but I'm also very cautious. I'm very optimistic based on the fundamentals of my restaurant. But I am also cautious because of inflation right now, the price increases. Once we came out of the pandemic, we hit significant inflation and it affected how we had to operate. There were price adjustments, menu adjustments, etc. We'll survive, but it has resulted in a lot of unpredictability in the business." ■

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