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BUSINESS TAPESTRY

SPARTAN SPIRIT SPELLS SUCCESS

Eateries thrive throughout Rochester area

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Staff writer

The gyro gives them away as Greek. The business names might be simple like Tom's or Sam's or Jay's or the "Such and Such" Family Restaurant. Their menus are filled with American classics — burgers, pancakes, blue plate specials such as pot roast or a hot turkey sandwich — and sometimes Italian or Mexican dishes, too.

But look closely at the menu of any local diner and you'll almost always find a gyro, a uniquely Greek sandwich consisting of roasted, pressed meat, lettuce, onions, tomatoes and yogurt dressing.

The dish alone or in the company of avgolemono, moussaka and souvlaki reveals the restaurant owners' heritage.

Greek-owned diners are so predominant in the New York City area that a blue-and-white cup with the traditional Greek key design popularized in the 1960s has become an icon of New York eateries. Here in Rochester those cups aren't common currency, but Greeks and Greek-Americans own what is undoubtedly a majority of the diners.

They run the gamut from bare-bones places where you can get an after-school or post-pub hot dog, to tonier establishments with elaborate brunch offerings and dinner specials including wine suggestions.

Behind them all are family stories of immigration from an impoverished

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Peter Gines owns Park Avenue dining spot Jines. "You don't see a lot of places serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. That's one way we separate ourselves and do it well," Gines said of his fellow Greeks. JAMIE GERMANOSTAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

- 1 Nick Tahou Hotz:
220 W. Main St., Rochester
- 2 Nick Tahou Hotz:
3070 West Henrietta Rd., Henrietta



- 3 Jines Restaurant:
658 Park Ave., Rochester
- 4 Parkside Diner:
4353 Culver Rd., Irondequoit

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

Business Tapestry looks at the social and economic forces that have propelled ethnic or racial groups into particular lines of work. Today's story is about the Greek immigrants who over the past 100 years have dominated the diner business.

NEXT WEEK

Tailoring is an ancient art — and the livelihood for thousands of immigrants to Rochester over the decades, from Italians to, more recently, Eastern Europeans and Turks.

PARKSIDE DINER

Parkside Diner is miles away from Nick Tahou's, but its history was born at the downtown eatery's kitchen. James Pappas said his father, Jerry Papaconstantinou came to the U.S. in 1952 at age 16 after his family decided he should seek his fortune abroad. His first job was in the kitchen at Tahou's.

Seventeen years later the immigrant converted a gas station at Mt. Read Boulevard and Emerson Street into Point West. That later became Andy's Mt. Read Diner. Meanwhile, uncles were running White Tavern downtown and Mitchell's Restaurant in Pittsford. Family members here and in Canada changed their difficult Greek name to Pappas, Popoff, Jocas and Mitchell.

Like the children of many diner owners, James Pappas, now 46, grew up helping out at his parents' restaurant but thought he might go into white-collar work. He spent a year at Monroe Community College and got a corporate job. But he soon realized that he really wanted to be self-employed.

In 1991 he bought a former diner at Culver Road and Lakeshore Drive, next to Durand Eastman Park. His late mother supplied the perfect name: Parkside.

A few years later, James'

older brother, Greg, joined the business. They've expanded several times and bought the venerable Whispering Pines miniature golf course next door in 1996. No longer running his own restaurant, Pappas' father comes into the Parkside nearly every day to help out and take on host duties when his sons' other obligations take them away from the restaurant.

The Parkside's menu is classic diner stuff, but Greek specials have been so popular that Pappas said he's adding them to the menu full-time for the summer to see how they'll do.

What makes the restaurant a diner, he said, are the traditional comfort foods and the counter. Sitting near that counter, he ticked off all the Greek-owned diners in Irondequoit, coming up with seven in a town of just 52,000 residents.

"That tells you the demand for this type of taurant," Pappas said. "There are so many v been in business for s long, we have to be doing something right."

Pappas' theory about why so many Greeks are drawn to the restaurant business is "personality."

"I think Greek people are outgoing in general and talkative." And, of course, they work really, really hard.

Parkside Diner
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