

Flapjacks

Winning formula guides restaurant

When it comes to operating a business, Flapjacks owners Donna and Mark Allen subscribe to the KISS philosophy: Keep It Simple, Stupid.

"Our formula is rather simple. We pretty much stick to pancakes and eggs," said Mark Allen. "We keep it fresh, and treat our customers as if they are coming into our home and not our restaurant."

Known for its oven-baked pancakes and large selection of omelettes, Flapjacks opened as a casual breakfast and lunch café in February 2008 at Fountain Hills Plaza, southwest corner of La Montana Drive and Palisades Boulevard. The 1,600-square-foot restaurant has a capacity of 54 seats.

Choices on the breakfast menu start with old-fashioned buttermilk pancakes or malted Belgian waffle for \$5.95. Oven-baked house specialties, such as apple, banana nut, orange-cranberry and German pancakes, are \$9.25.

Omelettes, served with toast and potatoes, are \$9.45. Cheese and meat can be added to the six varieties at an additional cost.

"Meltdown" (grilled cheese) sandwiches range from \$7.25 to \$8.95 for a tuna or turkey melt.

Allen estimates that Flapjacks serves between 700 to 750 breakfasts a week and about 150 lunches. Sundays is the busiest day.

Mark, a graduate of Culinary Institute of Amer-

ica in Hyde Park, N.Y., oversees the kitchen, and Donna "runs the floor" six days a week from 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, and 7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Sundays.

"We are closed on Mondays to help us catch our breath, and give our loyal employees, Rachel Lutz and Carlos and Geyla Gonzalez, a day off," said Mark.

The Allens give credit to their employees for much of their success.

"Rachel has been helping Donna in the dining room for more than 10 years dating back to our old Scottsdale location, and Carlos and Geyla are the anchors to our kitchen operation."

Chris Gerardo, vice president of leasing for The Pederson Group, said Flapjacks has become one of the center's most popular destinations.

"Most centers rely on their large anchor tenants to attract traffic, but Mark and Donna have created a unique neighborhood restaurant appealing to residents of the trade area. It is, indeed, gratifying to see a locally owned restaurant have such a high level of success in these challenging economic times. Other tenants in the center tell us that Flapjacks is a real drawing card that helps benefit other businesses within the center," said Gerardo.

The success of Flapjacks is a story of inspiration, dedication and perseverance.

"Our move to Arizona,"

Mark recalled, "was predicated on the chance to get a new start with our lives after our oldest son, Jared, died of leukemia when he was only eight years old. Donna and I helped operate two family-owned restaurants at 71st Street and Third Avenue in New York City, but felt we and our youngest son, Perry (now 22), needed a change of scenery and a fresh start to our lives."

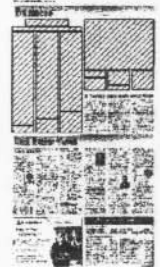
The Allens moved from Manhattan to Arizona in 1995, thanks to two close friends living in Scottsdale, he said.

After working two years at two AJ's Food Stores in Phoenix, the couple re-entered the restaurant business with the opening of the "original" Flapjacks Restaurant on Tom Darlington Boulevard in Carefree in 1998. The restaurant was an instant success featuring basically the same menu that is offered today in Fountain Hills.

Sales grew 50 to 60 percent in the restaurant's first year of operation, and in 1999 the Allens accepted a "substantial sum of money" to sell.

"In retrospect," Mark said, "we probably should not have sold it, but at the time we were actually considering moving back to New York to rejoin our family and the offer ... was just too good to walk away from."

The couple remained in Arizona and in 2000 launched their second restaurant, JP Pancake, at



the corner of Hayden and Mountain View Roads in Scottsdale.

"Our second restaurant was modestly successful, but after seven years, we decided we needed to make a move. That's when good fortune truly found us. A real estate broker we were working with called me in 2007 and indicated that he had found a perfect location for us in Fountain Hills at Fountain Hills Plaza."

The Allens, residents of central Phoenix, had to think long and hard about a 40-minute one-way commute each day six times a week.

"Our broker was convinced that our concept would be the perfect fit for Fountain Hills," said Mark.

Carol McGraw, a barista at a nearby Starbucks, has enjoyed breakfasts at Flapjacks since its open-

ing. "It's no wonder that they have been so successful," McGraw, a seven-year town resident. "Their emphasis on everything being so fresh is what sets Flapjacks apart from other restaurants. Whenever someone comes into Starbucks asking for the best in breakfast in town, we immediately send them to Flapjacks. They're never disappointed."



Flapjacks owners Donna and Mark Allen fill an order at the restaurant in Fountain Hills Plaza, corner of Palisades Boulevard and La Montana Drive.