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Oasis Cafe reimaged by the next generation

By Sharon K. Sobotta



Imran Alam with daughter Yasmin Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

After a four year hiatus, 19-year-old Niala Alam, a student at Diablo Valley Community College with aspirations of studying nursing and her 17-year-old sister Yasmin, a high school senior who plans to study art and design, jumped at the chance to bring Oasis Cafe, a restaurant started by their father nearly two decades ago, back to life.

The cafe sits on the ground floor of the Town Center Apartments adjacent to Baranco Cafe and the AT&T store in downtown Lafayette and is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day except Monday. It offers a menu of coffees, fresh watermelon juice, refreshers, salads, panini sandwiches, pastries and service that the sisters say is pure love. In its original form, Imran Alam, the father of Niala and Yasmin, operated the restaurant as a Mediterranean shop with items like fresh humus, kebabs, falafels and other dinner treats on the menu. Then, while dealing with some major health issues just before the pandemic, Imran took a break from running the restaurant.

"I love this location," Imran said. "When our lease was up, we had to choose between giving up on the restaurant or letting my girls take it over. I wasn't sure, because it's a lot of work. Both of my daughters said they could do it and now they are doing it. I am so proud (to pass the baton to them)."

While passing on the Oasis baton to his daughters, Imran says he wanted to be sure to pass on the key ingredients to restaurant success. "If you treat customers with respect and serve them good, fresh food and kindness, you can't go wrong," Imran said. "When a customer walks in smiling, it will make you feel happy too. Even though the menu has changed, the spirit of kindness and love in the cafe lives on."

In the Alam sister's reenvisioning of the cafe, the menu is simple yet eclectic - offering entrees ranging from a hippie salad with arugula, peaches and feta and a muay Thai salad filled with veggies, chicken and homemade dressing to a range of panini sandwiches.

"We decided that a simple cafe with all fresh ingredients would be perfect," Niala said. "There are plenty of coffee shops in this town, but we thought offering a place that serves coffee and delicious, healthy food made with love was the way to go."

The Oasis Cafe is not the only restaurant the family runs in town. Sonia Nawabi, the mother of Niala and Yasmin and wife of Imran, has owned and run 360 Gourmet Burrito for the past decade and a half. Yasmin Alam says she's learned the value of both hard work and heart work from her parents, and she's not taking the opportunity to take the reins on running a restaurant lightly.

"It feels really good to be a part of this community," Yasmin said. "People are very loyal here. I've grown up knowing lots of the people that still live in this area from the days when I used to come here with my dad."

Had the Alam family not gotten the Oasis Cafe back up and running this year, they would have had to vacate. But, for them, that wasn't an option. "We had a month to get back up and running and we completely understood why, after being closed for such a long time," Niala said. "But, we knew we didn't want to give up on it. Our mom has helped us a lot and we are doing it."

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