

Milton's Deli celebrates 25th anniversary and welcomes back chef Claire Allison

BY LUKE HAROLD

Twenty-five years after going into business and introducing their now-famous bread, chef Claire Allison, a Rancho Santa Fe resident, has returned to the deli she and owner Barry Robbins turned into a local landmark.

Milton's Delicatessen, Restaurant and Bakery in Del Mar celebrates its silver anniversary this year with Allison's return, including her new menu debuting this week, as well as a charity initiative running through Sept. 1 and revolving around the 80th summer racing season at Del Mar.

Every Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Milton's is hosting a \$25 customized Handicapper's Breakfast menu, with 20% of the proceeds going to the Boys & Girls Clubs of San Dieguito. Each breakfast will provide guests with a free ticket to the Del Mar races and tips from a handicapper on how to pick horses to bet on. Robbins' and Allison's passion for giving back to the community, the restaurant industry, and giving San Diego residents the best deli experience west of New York City began with a loaf of bread more than 25 years ago, when Milton's was still under construction.

Robbins' wife brought home a loaf of Allison's homemade multigrain bread, which she had been making for her friends. It had a note of sweetness unlike anything else available on store shelves. He offered Allison a job in the Milton's bakery.

"Up to then, anything really healthy in the bread category didn't have much flavor," Robbins said.

"Cardboard," added Allison, who said she made the bread based on a recipe her mother gave her almost 30 years ago.

Since then, Milton's multigrain bread has been popular in grocery stores and on sandwiches served at Milton's.

Allison left in 2007 to open her own restaurant, Claire's on Cedros in Solana Beach. She said her friends were nervous for her based on its Cedros Avenue location, inland from many of the other restaurants and businesses cluttered along the 101.

"I kept thinking if we served good food, they'd come," she said. "We did, and they did."

After a successful run, she sold the restaurant in October 2018 and decided to take a break from the industry. While she vacationed in Hawaii earlier this year, Robbins began plotting her return to Milton's as head chef.

"I'm hoping she's just bored and comes home totally ready to do something," he said.

The two sat at a table in the restaurant in



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Milton's Reuben Sandwich



Milton's Ultimate Bagel-- Cream cheese, avocado, bacon, tomato and arugula

June to talk turkey, and maybe a little pastrami. But shifting consumer preferences had been calling for more egg whites, spinach and tomato.

Claire's on Cedros had a lighter, healthy menu, and Allison has infused those types of offerings into the Milton's menu. Since they last worked together, health food has only grown in popularity and continues to fuel business growth, evidenced by the Whole Foods that opened across the parking lot from Milton's six years ago.

"You need a little more nowadays," said Robbins. "You need some healthy options to go along with that triple-decker, that Reuben."

But he still wants to preserve the menu items and practices that give local residents a deli experience they can't easily find on the West Coast, including soups made daily, fresh meat preparation and other menu items made from scratch.

"This place, you don't want to mess with what makes this a New York-style deli," he said.

Their goal with the updated menu: "If we



Barry Robbins and Claire Allison are working together again at Milton's, 25 years after introducing their now-famous bread and turning the deli into a local landmark.

start at good, we will get it to great," she said.

Milton's is located at 2660 Via de la Valle, Del Mar, 92014. Visit miltonsdeli.com. For questions regarding the Handicapper's Breakfast events, contact Maria Colyer at Milton's by

phone 858-792-2225, or e-mail, Maria@miltonsdeli.com.

For more on the Boys & Girls Clubs of San Dieguito, visit bgsanDieguito.org or call (858) 755-9371.