



MARK R. SULLIVAN N&D MAGAZINE

# Paramount Diner brings the best of land and sea to Manasquan

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N&D MAGAZINE

For well over 40 years, Paramount Diner has stood at the heart of Manasquan, feeding its hungry residents and tourists alike. While the owners may have changed recently, the food is better than ever.

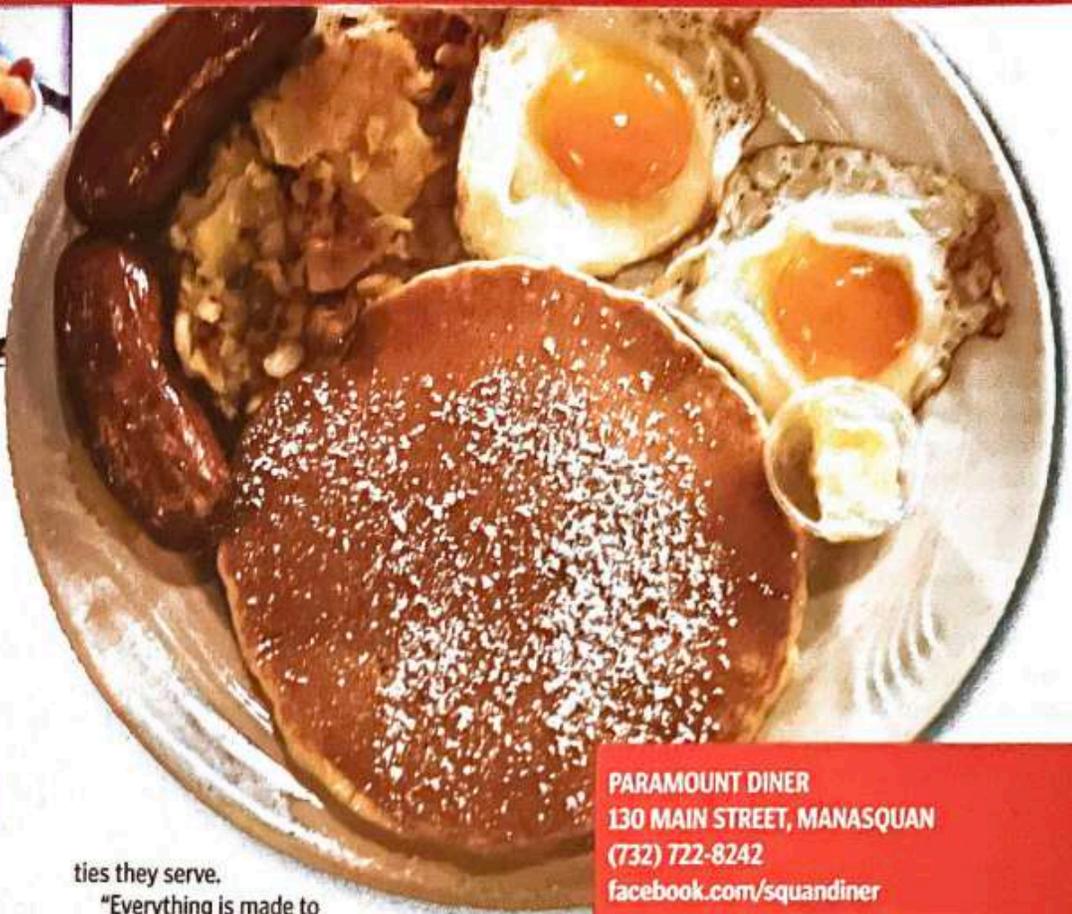
Owners Linda and Mike Smith purchased the diner last year in April, keeping much of its staff, chefs and overall feel for the diner. The aesthetic is an old-timey diner with booths and a counter for residents to sit and enjoy a variety of breakfast and lunch foods.

"We have been coming here for 30 years, absolutely love it, we have known the chefs for 20 years and we wanted it to stay a community diner," said Linda on why she and her husband bought the place after they retired. "We didn't want it to change into a big corporation or conglomerate. We wanted it to be something that people in this community could come to and everyone knows you." Linda and Mike have lived in Brielle their whole lives.

Prior to purchasing the diner, Linda worked as a nurse for over 40 years, and Mike was a police officer and owned his own refinishing and antique business.

Linda said they feel they are the "Cheers" of diners in the community, referencing the 1982 sitcom.

Since their purchase, business has been booming, according to Linda. "We made some changes when we took over, such as quality." Many of their vendors are now local, purchasing the freshest of goods from people within or nearby the communi-



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ties they serve.

"Everything is made to order and has fresh ingredients daily," said Linda.

"I may not be Greek, but I know how to smile, I know how to make good food, I know cleanliness, and that is what people want," said Linda. "They want to feel like they are in the community, and this is our community get-together."

Mike jokingly said he had "no idea" why he and his wife decided to buy this diner. "I was a customer for 40 years. I grew up here, I grew up in the neighborhood, in Brielle, Manasquan. Being a customer here and an ex-cop from Brielle, we thought we were going to retire and didn't want to sit at home having the television watch us."

The diner is open seven days a week, 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Christmas is the only day they will close. The diner also does take out orders.

Mike said support for this diner has been "overwhelming."

"The community itself has been terrific. A lot of locals are repeat customers. Some go away in the winter, but they always find their way back into the spring," Mike said.

## PROUD OF THE FOOD

Residents would be hard pressed to not find anything on the menu they do not like. Paramount Diner's expansive and ever-growing menu offers so many delectable dishes to sink teeth into.

The owners credit much of the diner's success to its two head chefs, Hugo Zhinio and Armando Caballero.

Among the menu, Linda said the fresh ingredients, such as Jersey tomatoes from Smith Market in Wall Township and lobster from Point Lobster, in

Point Beach, make their dishes that much better.

## "PARAMOUNTAL" BREAKFAST

Sometimes, one is not enough, and at Paramount Diner, when there is so much to get and to try, the "Paramountal" Breakfast platter offers tastes of many dishes the diner has to offer.

This dish offers two buttermilk pancakes or french toast, two eggs, potatoes and bacon or sausage to choose from. The eggs can be prepared in any way patrons would like.

Linda said, "Our pancakes are made from scratch. We do not use a box-mix for our pancakes, waffles or soups. Everything is made fresh."

These pancakes are second to none, as they are wonderfully warm and fluffy. Each bite is filled with flavor that is only amplified by the warm Vermont maple syrup, which the diner imports from a vendor directly in Vermont.

But the true star of this dish is the sausage. The pork king sausage is unbelievably juicy and has so much flavor packed into each bite, that you may just want to order a plate of sausage for breakfast.

Another stand not included with the dish is their orange juice. Squeezed fresh to order, this was the best orange juice this reporter has had in their entire life, hands down.

## AVOCADO TOAST

"Our avocado toast is very good, all fresh ingredients," said Linda, and fresh barely describes how rich this dish is.

Served with a bowl of fresh fruit, the multiple

# CRAVINGS

pieces of crispy seven-grain toast each come with a juicy, fresh tomato beautifully slathered in slices of avocado that melt into your mouth.

For avocado toast fans, or even avocado fans period, this is a dish that needs to be eaten purely for the avocado. The way the avocado melts in your mouth is unlike any other avocado you will ever try.

## LOBSTER ROLLS

New to the diner this year is the lobster menu, serving a variety of lobster dishes including different style rolls, salads, sandwiches and omelets.

Mike said, "One of the things we added this year that has been a tremendous seller, and we took a bit of a chance on it, was the lobster menu."

"There must be people who come to this heavy-tourist area who want a really good lobster roll, and so we said let's give it a try. We did some research on it...and we came up with a good menu and it's been flying out the door."

On a recent visit Night and Day Magazine tried a traditional style lobster roll, called the Connecticut Style-Lobster Roll. This roll is served with fresh coleslaw, a delicious pickle slice, incredibly crispy and unique french fries and butter-poached Maine lobster. Served in a split top bun, the lobster melts in your mouth. Paired with the crispy french fries, this is a surprisingly delicious piece of seafood coming from a diner.

A second lobster roll on the menu with a bit more flair is the Lobster and Jersey Tomato Salad, which is Maine lobster served in a ripe, red Jersey Tomato with a mixed green side salad and a lemon vinaigrette dressing.

Not only was the presentation on this dish outstanding, but the flavor was truly unique. Lobster served inside of a tomato was not something this reporter felt they needed to try within their lives. To any seafood fans reading, do not sleep on this lobster roll, as it honestly competes with some of the best rolls around.

## CHICKEN SOUVLAKI

For any diner to be considered a real diner, they need to have some amazing Greek food, and Paramount Diner delivers on this as well.

Served up next was chicken Souvlaki, skewered chunks of grilled chicken over a greek salad served with pita bread and a delicious Tzatziki sauce, made fresh of course.

The warm pita bread paired with the delicious chicken that had a great mix of spices cooked right into it made for a fantastic collaboration. And the sauce was cool, creamy and such a delight that made the chicken and the pita that much better to eat.

## LEARNING THE INDUSTRY

Throughout the year of ownership, both owners have learned a lot more about the food industry than they bargained for. Mike said, "You have to wear a lot of different hats all at the same time. As



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an owner, as a boss, procurement officer because you have to know how to order."

He further said, "Freshness is an important thing to us. Cleanliness is important. There are just so many things that go into it, but that is why it makes things so interesting."

## IMPORTANCE ON COMMUNITY

Both Linda and Mike love this diner and the community, and felt it was necessary to keep the same feel of the diner once they purchased it.

"After what everyone has been through, this is four years post-COVID, everybody went through so much at that time and people have come back around to really believe in the comfort in having community and feeling safe," said Linda.

The diner also gives back to the community throughout the year, especially on Thanksgiving. As a "thank you" to the community, Paramount Diner offers free breakfast all morning, from 7 to 11 a.m. Only serving pancakes, bacon, coffee and juice, that is more than enough to get the community out to the diner.

The outdoor patio section is fully pet friendly and the diner often posts these furry friends to their Instagram page. Plus, fishermen who are eating early in the morning are given a free bag of ice to take with them.

On top of this, both Mike and Linda can always be seen working within their own diner, both in

front and behind the scenes. Whether it is serving tables, taking orders or buying more boxes of food, the Smiths have taken a very hands-on approach to managing this diner.

"This is such a great feel," Mike said. "You can come in here almost every day of the week...It is just a wonderful place. It is like a "Cheers" but with a diner flair. Growing up here, it has always been one of things that has anchored us here instead of moving away. This was home."

## BREAKFAST AND LUNCH ONLY

One of the biggest complaints that Linda and Mike receive from residents is how they are only open from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Both Linda and Mike said while there are no concrete plans to expand to dinner hours, nothing is ever off the table.

Linda added, "There are a lot of businesses in town here that count on dinner. I feel like that is their chance and their opportunity. My husband and I both feel we have the breakfast and lunch crowd we are very grateful for. We have talked about doing something once a month, but the other restaurants around here count on their dinner. Being mindful of the other businesses and what they are doing in town is important."

Regardless, the Smiths want to thank all their staff and the community for continuing to support them throughout this journey, and hope to continue to do this for the distant future.

