

Jonathans of Oakville celebrates 30th anniversary

By Heather Rollo
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As you approach the building on the corner of Thomas and Church streets in downtown Oakville, the first thing you might notice is that it doesn't look like a restaurant at all.

Well, it is... but Jonathans of Oakville reaches beyond just a place to eat.

After 30 years in the downtown core, Jonathans of Oakville has evolved into much more than a great place to enjoy a gourmet meal. It's become a fixture, an institution, a favourite of the locals, as well as guests of the town and an iconic piece of history in downtown Oakville.

Jonathan Alikakos, the restaurant's namesake, opened the restaurant on Feb. 28, 1981. After seven years of operating a restaurant in Toronto and three years spent searching for the perfect location, Jonathan settled on an original home built in the mid-1800s on the corner of Thomas and Church Streets and began work on making his dream a reality.

Thirty years in the restaurant industry is a milestone.

"I always knew we'd get to this point," said Jonathan. "I never doubted it for a minute. But we didn't get here on our own; the town was of great help in our early years, and we owe a lot of thanks to the people that have been dining here for these past 30 years and supporting us."

After watching his father develop his vision, Jason Alikakos stepped into his father's shoes in 1994 to become the owner of Jonathans of Oakville.

"He's been doing a great job," Jonathan says of his son. "It's a family business through and through and even though I taught him everything he knows, I still learn from him."

One piece of knowledge that Jonathan instilled in his son was that a restaurant that doesn't evolve, doesn't survive.

"You can't last 30 years in the restaurant business without changing, trying to achieve high standards and evolving with the demographics," says Jason. "We wouldn't have survived this long if we kept everything the same."

A perfect example of the restaurant's evolution is the seating capacity. Originally built to accommodate 112 guests, Jonathans



KAREN NEWMAN / OAKVILLE BEAVER

FAMILY BUSINESS: Jason and Jonathan Alikakos in one of the seven dining rooms at Jonathans.

of Oakville has grown to a capacity of 234 guests inside, spread throughout seven rooms (including three private rooms on the upper level, providing an intimate setting for special celebrations) and an additional 27 on the patio that lines Church Street, which replaced the original patio that first opened in 1991.

"My dad and I, on our hands and knees along Church Street, laid every stone of that patio by ourselves," says Jason.

In 1998, the area's demographic was changing and downtown Oakville was beginning to see a younger clientele looking for a casual place to meet for drinks. It was that evolution, which led Jason to open Jonathans Seafood & Souffle Bar four years after taking the helm (and 17 years to the day Jonathans of Oakville opened).

Now known as J-Bistro, it offered the young professional crowd a place to enjoy a great bistro experience, and continues to do the same for all types of patrons today.

The roots of Jonathans menus are French,

featuring French methods of cooking such as charcuterie, soufflés and terrines, but Mediterranean elements inspired by Jason's travelling experience (including fish and lamb dishes) have been introduced over the course of the menu updates.

Just as people's tastes in food change, so do their tastes in wine. All those years ago, Jonathans of Oakville began with a selection of French wines that paired best with their Parisian cuisine, but Jason has expanded the collection to include wines that he has discovered around the world.

"We have French wines, Californian wines, Italian wines... we gear our wine list to feature what we know people want," Jason says. "For the past few years, we've been working with a winery in Niagara to create our own Vintners Quality Alliance house wines, including a chardonnay, a sauvignon blanc and a pinot grigio, which has been gaining popularity. We strive to stay ahead of the trends, rather than play catch-up to them."

†No purchase necessary. Contest closes at 11:59 pm ET on July 31, 2011. Open only to residents of Alberta, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec 19 years of age or older. One grand prize, consisting of \$10,000 in travel gift certificates from Air Canada Vacations, is available to be won. *Air Canada Vacations is a registered trademark of Air Canada, used under license by Touram Limited Partnership, 5925 Airport Road, Suite 700, Mississauga, ON. Correct answer to mathematical skill-testing question required. Odds of winning depend on the number of eligible entries received. For full contest rules, visit your local Allstate agency. †You may qualify for discounts of up to 45% when you combine your auto and home insurance with Allstate. Inclusive of all other discounts as applied to Allstate's base rates. Terms and conditions apply and may vary by region. Rates and discounts subject to change. Trademark owned by Allstate Insurance Company used under licence by Allstate Insurance Company of Canada. © 2011 Allstate Insurance Company of Canada.