

SPOTLIGHT ON . . . Haddad's

November 2009

"Spotlights" is a new series focusing on Main Street business owners – who they are, what they do, how they do it, and why. The series consists of short, informative, interviews to introduce or, in some cases, remind the community of our loyal, local businesses who keep Main Street humming.

Haddad's Restaurant and Catering
1010 W. Main Street, Peoria, IL
(309) 672-5339

Hours:
Monday – Saturday
11:00 am – 8:00 pm
carry out available/no delivery

1. What do you sell or what service do you provide?

Rita Speck, the daughter of Tony and Loreece Haddad, who own Haddad's Restaurant, explains that their menu is a mix of Mediterranean favorites and American extras. Everything is made from scratch using traditional family recipes that have been handed down verbally from grandmother to mother to daughter. Daily specials like Kafta Stew and Chicken, Rice and Green Beans have been served at family gatherings for years. New recipes are often just remembered tastes from childhood that Rita inquires about and her mother pulls from memory. If you've been downtown Peoria in the Summer or at any of the many Riverfront events, you've probably seen the Haddad's push cart selling lemon shake-ups and gyros among other items. Their seasonal business is a critical component of their long-standing success as is catering. They do company picnics, meetings, birthdays, anniversaries, funerals, and just about anything else. They grill onsite and will do any combination of Lebanese or American favorites.

2. How long have you been at your current address?

Haddad's has been a Main Street fixture since 1980. They have occupied several different spaces, but just bought at 1010 W. Main so they won't be moving again! The current space is open for business but construction continues in Phase II to build out the rear of the building into a full service, sit down restaurant. They are excited to finally own their own space and have plans to personalize the interior with a custom mural.

3. How do customers hear about you? Who are your customers?

The name Haddad's is synonymous with Mediterranean cuisine in Peoria. They pull a steady lunch business from both hospitals and CAT below the hill as well as Bradley and the surrounding neighborhoods. Many will call-in orders in advance and simply pick up and be on their way. For the moment, there are only a few tables so that's not a bad idea!

4. What brought you to Main Street initially?

Being on Peoria's "Main" Street has always made sense to the Haddad's. Where else would you want to be? They appreciate the mix of "mom 'n pop" businesses and the variety of ethnic restaurants represented. The people and the neighborhood seem to fit with their personal preferences.

5. Why do you stay on Main Street?

Rita grew up and still lives in the West Bluff and wouldn't go anywhere else. This area is home to her and her family. She has ties to the neighborhood schools and her family has been able to successfully operate a business on Main Street for close to 20 years! Why move?

6. How did you start your business? What is your background and qualifications?

The Haddad's emigrated from Lebanon in the late 1970's. Mother, father, grandmother and 6 children came to Peoria to live with an aunt and to start a new life. With 25\$ in their pocket and not a word of English, they started selling fruits and vegetables out of the back of a truck in the Aldi parking lot. Rita's mother happened to see the push carts in downtown Peoria one Summer and she saw the possibilities. They made 300\$ on the first day and the rest is history. A loyal customer suggested opening a restaurant and they opened next to the Varsity Theater (present day Campus Town) in the early 1980's. All the food at the restaurant is made from scratch and based on family recipes handed down through generations. For authentic Lebanese food you can't go wrong. Rita herself always wanted to open a bakery when she was young. Growing up in Peoria she was very conscious of "fitting in". Thanksgiving was an unknown holiday to her family and so she decided to learn what was served and how to cook it. She has hosted Thanksgiving every year for her family since she was 9 years old!

7. What do you like most about your day?

Rita loves the flexibility of her schedule, sharing responsibilities with her mom and dad, her husband, as well as her brother and sister-in-law. They all take a shift that is convenient for them and all the work gets done. She also enjoys being around people and gets to know her regulars as "gyro extra onions no sauce"!

8. Name one thing would you like to see change on main street

A more “walkable” atmosphere on Main Street would change so much. As you watch out the restaurant windows, traffic volume is not intense. Narrowing Main Street would be fine with her. It would contribute a lot to a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

9. What is number one best-seller or oddest item/request?

Their best sellers are gyros and lemon shake-ups available year round.

10. What is unique about your store?

We are a family-owned and operated business. We love what we do and it shows in the quality of our food, our reasonable prices, and our friendly atmosphere.

11. How many employees do you have?

Rita as well as my mother, father, husband, sister-in-law and brother operate the business on a daily basis. Everyone pitches in when we need help.

12. What is your busy season/time?

Summer is our busiest season with the restaurant open, push carts, catering, and festivals.

13. What other types of businesses would you like to see on Main Street?

We would love to see antique stores, a florist, and a jeweler. With the addition of on-street parking something similar to historic Galena would be wonderful!