

Brown Derby saluted as leader in smoke-free dining movement

MONROE

"If you're smoking in here, you'd better be on fire" reads a plaque on the wall of the Brown Derby, a well-known Monroe restaurant. Owner Jimmy Tsiamis shared his journey of becoming smoke free with members of the Smoke Free Union Coalition last week. The group was there to present him with a certificate identifying his restaurant as one of a growing number that do not allow smoking.

"It's been nothing but positive," said Tsiamis, who said the Brown Derby became completely smoke free in 2002, after first banning smoking from the lunchtime crowd.

Tsiamis recalled that one evening a customer said to him, "We love your restaurant and your food. We'd come back more often except we feel like we're being held hostage. You never know when someone at the next table is going to light up a cigarette." Tsiamis made the decision that day to go completely smoke free.

"I personally would like to see that people could go anywhere in public and not be afraid to be subjected to others' cigarette smoke," he said.

An ex-smoker who broke the habit nine years ago, Tsiamis says making the restaurant smoke free is the best thing he's ever done.

"It was a little scary in the beginning not knowing how it would affect the business," he said. "But I can't say anything negative about it. It's been great." He remembers only one customer leaving after reading the "No Smoking" sign. However, Tsiamis says, "For any one customer you may lose, you gain three more for being smoke free." Tsiamis says it just makes good business sense to be smoke free. The restaurant is not as dirty; employees don't have to deal with ashtrays and burns; the blinds are clean-er; and customers know they don't have to be subjected to smoke.

"We've had a few staff who smoke and they just go out back, ! no problem. The other staff love it," he said. Reflecting on the grow-ing trend of prohibiting smoking in public places, Tsiamis notes that even in restaurants that still allow smoking, the smoking sections seem to be shrinking. "Smoking sections don't work. If smoking is allowed at the bar or other smoking area, it still travels to the non-smoking tables," he said. "Sure smokers have the right to smoke, but not where they can subject others to their smoke." Tsiamis' advice to other restaurant owners? "Don't be afraid to make the switch. You'll have more people respect your decision than not." As for the Brown Derby, business is booming. Tsiamis told members of Smoke Free Union, "I'm so glad you guys are doing this. I was so excited when I heard that someone was going to promote smoke free restaurants. It's a great thing. It's what Union County needs."



Sarah Bolt presents Brown Derby manager Jimmy Tsiamis with a certificate to hang in his restaurant recognizing its Smoke Free status. Surrounding the two, from left, are Robin Landsman, Lyda Taylor, Kim Bayha, Deb Stranges and Anne Velasco, all, like Bolt, members of the Smoke Free Union Coalition.

To learn more about smoke free dining and to view a Union County Smoke Free Dining Guide, visit www.smokefreeunion.com.

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