

"Rainbow Oaks back in a big way"

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These days, Duke Maples has a certain gleam in his eye that only a hardworking man possesses when he has completed one chapter in his life and opened another.

In August the Corona resident quit his job working as food and beverage manager for the Marriott in Rancho Bernardo, and just last Thursday he reopened the newly transformed Rainbow Oaks Restaurant in Rainbow Valley.

The restaurant would catch Duke's eye while commuting to and from work with the kind of curiosity that keeps popping inside one's head at all hours of the night as he passed by each day.

The restaurant had seen better days, but at the time Duke had never been inside.

One day he and his wife, Jonell, were taking a ride on their Harley and saw a "For Lease" sign in the window.

Jonell said they called the phone number as soon as they got home and took their helmets off, although Duke might argue it was the next day.

When Duke saw the restaurant for the first time, it needed a lot of work. Nonetheless, he knew it had great potential and immediately fell in love with it.

"When we opened, we didn't even tell anybody," said Duke. "The locals knew the health inspector was coming, and once he signed off, we were in business the next day. The place was packed."

That was last Thursday.

Rainbow Oaks, beautiful with wide open spaces, high ceilings, rough-hewn pine plank walls, exposed beams and antler chandeliers, is exactly how Duke pictured it.

He found a man in Aguanga who made the tabletops out of the 2007 fire-damaged oak trees from the Fallbrook mountains.

The outdoor patio has tables and chairs made from recycled milk cartons. Building materials like these make this a greener establishment.

Like Robert Durfos of Tule Peak Timber, Duke said he tried to use all local businesses to turn the once-rundown restaurant into the much-needed hotspot it is today.

Surrounding the patio are monster African sumac trees from Roseland Nursery next door, and fresh flowers for the dining tables come from Rainbow Oaks Florist located across the way.

For those scarred by the old bathrooms, rest assured, they are immaculate, bigger and modernized.

“Everything imaginable was redone,” said Jonell. “The electrical, plumbing – we had to dig up the floors and get all new HEVAC.”

“We signed a 20-year lease, so if we were going to do it, we were going to do it right,” Duke added.

All items on the menu are homemade, said the Maples, even the salad dressing and salsa.

Breakfast is served all day, which includes scrumptious egg dishes with a variety of side choices such as home fries and sourdough bread.

They also offer a light menu.

Lunch-hungry mouths can feast on garden-fresh salads and hot or cold sandwiches.

Cobb salad, for example, is a mountain of iceberg and romaine lettuce with tomatoes, crumbled blue cheese, avocado, hardboiled eggs, carrot strips, ham, bacon and turkey. The Cobb can also be tossed with the dressing on request.

Served Sunday through Thursday, after 4 p.m., consider the daily dinner specials, such as the continued tradition of fried chicken. This item which used to be served on Wednesdays is now served on Tuesdays. Additionally, it now has a healthier edge and is served with mashed potatoes and vegetables.

Jonell said Chef Jose Uribe makes a meatloaf dish that will knock anyone’s socks off.

Kids 10 and under will find breakfast items and for lunch and dinner, all-American hot and corn dogs, simple macaroni and cheese, crispy-crunchy chicken strips and more.

Duke once worked for Cisco Foods, where he became very familiar with meats. They have seven cuts of steak coming from Midwest corn-fed cows and all meal portions are oversized.

Something on the menu that is hard to find anywhere else on the West Coast are pierogies, potato and cheddar cheese wrapped in dough, a kind of Polish dumpling that is served with sour cream and sauerkraut.

Make room for a dish of homemade classic, creamy, vanilla-spiked tapioca or a thick slice of spiced bread pudding.

Longtime Rainbow resident Tom Casey expressed both relief and excitement over the reopening of the Oaks.

“As the sole food and beverage establishment in Rainbow,” he said, “the opening of the Oaks is not only greatly appreciated, the exceptional ambiance the Maples family has put in place perfectly compliments the essence and history of our community.”

Casey helped decorate the restaurant’s walls with reprints of the Fallbrook Historical Society’s period photographs, many of which came from Margret Hindorff Ray’s personal collection. Her father moved to Rainbow in 1883.

Also hanging on the walls are a picture of JPM Rainbow, for whom the unincorporated town of San Diego County was named, old and new fire department photos and even the Maples showing off a burley mountain lion they hunted.

Many car clubs and cyclists can now return to one of their favorite weekend rest stop.

The parking lot, easily seen from large windows, where the bar has been relocated or the kickin’ outdoor patio remain keen resting spots for that run-nu-nu-nun-nun, restored ’53 Corvette or sweet motorcycle of preference.

The restaurant opens at 6 a.m., The kitchen closes at 9 p.m., and the bar calls it a night around 11.

From Temecula take the I-15 south, exit Rainbow Valley Blvd., turn left off the freeway, turn right on Old Hwy 395 and turn left on Fifth St.

The restaurant is at 4815 Fifth Street St. in Rainbow. It can be reached at (760) 723-2279 for additional information.