

Cosy Grill's Louis Tsichlas hangs up his cook's apron

Ham and eggs to go...

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Most passersby won't notice. But today will mark the turning of a well-read page in the history of downtown Belleville.

Louis Tsichlas, owner and founder of the Cosy Grill, is officially hanging up his cook's apron after a 51-year marathon behind the counter at his Front Street eatery.

Known to generations of customers simply as "Lou," the handing over of his beloved restaurant to new owners today brings an end to an era that began in 1950 when he purchased the Dianna Grill in the once-bustling core.

It was a heady time for a young man from the small island village of Xios, Greece, who jumped ship in Quebec in 1945 at the end of the Second World War in search of a new life full of prosperity and adventure.

At the age of 23, Tsichlas left his position as a navigator in the Greek Merchant Navy when he walked down the gangplank of his vessel, the Taxathees, and disappeared into the dockyards of Trois Rivieres, Que.

His future looked bright, but there was a slight problem.

Once in Montreal, although he found a job quite quickly at a small restaurant as a cook, he was quickly ferreted out by authorities for illegally working in Canada — he had not secured landed immigrant status.

"I didn't have a passport or anything. The immigration people caught me and threw me in jail," chuckled Lou, 78, at his restaurant Wednesday, puffing an ever-present cigarette to the sound of a sizz-

zling grill and a cash register ringing away.

When he applied for citizenship papers from a Montreal jailhouse, Tsichlas was denied, then released and ordered deported within 29 days.

Through a few contacts in the Montreal Greek community, how-

ever, he learned that a friend of his had relatives in Belleville, a place where he could hide out to avoid being shipped back to a home country where opportunity simply wasn't as abundant as in Canada.

Once in Belleville in 1948, he quickly landed a job at the Esquire

Grill at the lower end of Front Street and within two years, had saved enough money for a down payment to open his very own eatery in the form of the Dianna, located on the east side of Front Street just north of City Hall.

He also bought his first home, married his wife Stamo in 1952

and three years later, with at least five years of Canadian residency under his belt, he applied with the help of a lawyer at the Hastings County courthouse for landed status. His application was accepted.

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TSICHLAS, Louis and Mano