

Couple duplicates good food, service at Ski Run



Artemis at Ski Run has fire pits out front and a view of Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

Owning and operating a restaurant is said to be a difficult endeavor – even more so in a place like Lake Tahoe because of the ebb and flow of customers as the seasons change or if the snow falls. Double that and people might question your sanity.

But that's exactly what Brian and Angela Luke did this year when they opened a second Artemis restaurant in South Lake Tahoe.

"It's been harder than we thought, definitely. But it seems to be working out," Brian Luke told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We had some growing pains. We are getting it dialed in."

Getting a day off – well, that never completely happens.

“Every day there is something,” Angela Luke said. “It hardly feels like work when we are both involved. It’s part of our everyday life. I can’t imagine it not being part of our life.”

But they will be even busier in January when their second child arrives. Still, the restaurants are their babies in a different way.

“Every location brings a different set of challenges. You have to jump in and immerse yourself before you are clear what those challenges are and how to go about tackling them,” she said.

Two restaurants weren’t in their plans when the first eatery in the Kings Trading Center near the Y opened in 2010.

“It was kind of out of necessity,” Brian Luke said. “We outgrew that place in the summer.”

Seating in the back patio was added, but the kitchen was still tiny. This created additional problems – the inability to get food to the table in a timely manner.

So, then the couple wrestled with whether it would be better to get a larger location or open a second restaurant. They looked at several locations, including the old Swiss Chalet.

Then Elie Alyeshmerni, owner of Ski Run Marina, approached the Lukes about taking over a soon to be vacant suite in his center. They jumped at the opportunity and opened that spot in May.



Aubrey, Brian and Angela
Luke

It's not visible from Highway 50 like the Y location, but it has a lake view – something the strip mall can't offer.

The menus are relatively the same, with lunch and dinner offered at both.

Two big differences at the Ski Run location are the full bar and breakfast. The former allows them to offer a comprehensive happy hour every day from 3-6pm. An espresso bar and mimosas are indicative of the variety of morning drinks that are available. Breakfast is a mix of American and Greek dishes.

What the Lukes have noticed at Ski Run is the extremes – super quiet or super busy. A rush comes in before the Tahoe Queen is set to sail. Tourists are finding the restaurant, while locals are more often found at the Y location.

“The first one is definitely very homey. It is very local clientele-based and very comfortable for people who have been coming there for four years,” Angela Luke told *Lake Tahoe News*. “This one is a lot more tourist driven. One of our main goals is to also make this a place where locals can enjoy. It's such a great location.”

Next summer the outdoor bar will be operational. This time of year fire pits are keeping people warm outside. Getting into the catering side of the food industry is another goal.

Brian Luke has an extensive background in restaurants, having worked in the Caribbean as an executive chef and in other aspects of the industry before opening Artemis. He knew he was ready to open his own restaurant; he just thought it would be in the Bay Area. Prices, though, made that an unrealistic dream.

As a kid his family made regular treks to Tahoe. One Christmas he came snowboarding and started looking around at various vacancies where he might be able to open a restaurant.

The Greek theme came about by not wanting to duplicate what existed on the South Shore. Plus, he was familiar with Mediterranean food and it ties into the healthy Lake Tahoe lifestyle.

“I was trying to fill a niche that nobody was doing and trying to do it really well – good food at good prices and a great atmosphere, with great service,” Brian Luke said.

(Angela, who grew up in South Lake Tahoe, met Brian as he was opening the first restaurant.)

Beyond the food, the service is one thing that sets Artemis apart from other restaurants in South Lake Tahoe. The staff at both locations is attentive, friendly and knowledgeable.

“Service has been the hardest thing because of the transient nature of town. It’s hard to find good people in this town,” Luke said. “I’ve never had such hard time finding staff that was qualified and would show up and take things seriously and act like professionals.”

Training is critical – so are standards. Luke said if people don’t meet their standards, they are let go.

“We didn’t want to accept that this is just Tahoe,” he said. He isn’t lowering his standards.

His employees have been rewarded, with many who have been with

them since Day 1 who have risen to management positions.

“Our goal is to be perfect. We try to get as close as we can on a daily basis,” Luke said.