MORE THAN PANCAKES

by monica eggink

Albert's Restaurant owner Leslie Krushinsky and her staff hosted a customer appreciation event on July 31st to thank their most faithful customers for their business, and to remind them about a planned summer holiday closure. I was invited to the event to talk to a few of the people there. Server Claudine Lajoie ushers me around the room, introducing me to people like they are her old friends. Which I suppose they are. What do I learn about Albert's?

1 They serve a good breakfast. I know this from my own periodic weekend visits with my family. And I hear everyone say it at this event. David Hockett is in the armed forces; he insists that this Albert's location has the best breakfast he's had anywhere in the world. "I come here once a week. I've had breakfasts in Denmark and England and Germany and France. But this here is the best breakfast, I'm gonna say, that I've had on the planet."

2 Things haven't changed much over the years, and customers like it that way. Irene Kurzitza and her husband Roland raised 3 kids in Westmount. They live in Jasper Place now, but they still come to this Albert's every Sunday for breakfast. Irene likes being able to count on the consistency of the place. "They don't have to change stuff. We like that," she declares. "I love that poster," adds Roland. "It says, 'Our signature spices are salt and pepper.' Doesn't have to be a blend or a fusion. It's a little bit old-fashioned."



3 People love Leslie, and she has a big heart. Randy Roach and his wife Susan have been coming to Albert's for 20 years. "Everybody knows Leslie. Leslie collects people. She'll spend time with everybody. Homeless people come here. She finds them something to eat," says Randy. Susan chimes in with more tales of Leslie's understated philanthropy: "She'll keep an eye out for the older guys that are on their own. She'll make up a plate for them at Thanksgiving to take home."

4 Not everyone knows that Leslie is the owner. She is a reluctant star. At the appreciation event, she doesn't want to pose for a photo. She wants me to take a picture without her knowing about it. She started working at Albert's 27 years ago. "I've been the owner for 6 years, but I've never come out openly about that. I just carried on the way things were," she tells me.

5 Albert's was threatened with closure. "That's how I became the owner," says Leslie. "I believe in this place. I believe in the people. I love the people who come here. I'm very attached. I've seen kids grow up. I love this place. It's a community place."

6 It's a community place. Many of the people that I speak to use Albert's as their regular get-together location for their family or friend group. René Hebers has been coming every Thursday morning with a group of 5 or 6 friends for 12 years. "We all belong to churches, and this came out of an organization called Promise Keepers. We hold ▸▸





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each other accountable to make sure our marriages are doing well, being good husbands and dads." Grant Nicol is here with his cousins Donna and Diane. "We all come as a family," he says. "I live in Riverbend. But I lived here in Westmount; I used to walk here. I came here lots. I knew Leslie when she was very young, working here, years ago. I'm part of this family group, and we come here every Saturday morning. Sometimes there's 7 of us, sometimes 8, or as many as 11 if they all come." Grant enjoys getting to know the other regulars: "When you keep coming to the same place, there are other people that come here, that we now know. We now feel like we are all part of the same family. We speak to them, they speak to us. And then if you see them other than here, we chat and visit, so it's like meeting new friends."

Susan Roach tells me she and her family come for the people. Her husband Randy enjoys getting to know other people's stories. "Those people over there are beekeepers," says Randy. "So when we see them, we talk about the bees and ask how their honey is doing. There's a couple of ladies in here who are nurses. One of them is 74 years old, and says she's retiring on August 14th. 74 years old! Claudine, who works here, has worked as a substitute teacher at my granddaughter Selene's school."



7 Leslie wants you to come by. "I'd like Westmount residents to know we're here," says Leslie. "And to support us. We live in an old building, just like Sideliners, and everybody knows what happened to Sideliners. We face that all the time. We're just a small business trying to stay alive in the neighbourhood. That's what I want people to know."

Albert's Family Restaurant is at 10604 124th Street
They're open Mon-Sat 7-3, Sun 8-3



photos (top right, clockwise): Randy Roach & David Hockett • Kandis Bright and Miriam Moisin • Roland & Irene Kurtzitza • Rene Hebers, Miriam Moisin, and Albert's owner Leslie Krushinsky



