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Johnny's Diner finds new owners

By BRANDON JOHANSSON
The Aurora Sentinel

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AURORA | The regulars who fill the booths at Johnny's Diner and fill up on the restaurant's famous burgers and shakes don't have to fear the Aurora classic changing anytime soon.

The famous drive thru window at the diner near East Iliff Avenue and South Havana Street isn't going anywhere.

Neither are the famed hamburgers, milk shakes and french fries.

And the 1950s decor and music will be there, too.

The only thing that's changed about the staple on Aurora's dining scene is the owners.

Sean Pak and his wife, Michele, bought Johnny's Diner about a month ago from Doug Beck, who owned the restaurant for more than a decade.

And, Sean Pak said, he wants the customers to know that he doesn't have any intentions of changing Johnny's.

"This is a legend in Aurora," he said during an interview at the diner last week. "I don't want to change anything."

Pak said while he lives in Highlands Ranch, he regularly shops in Aurora and knew Johnny's well before he bought it.

Late last year he and his wife, who previously owned a deli near the Inverness Hotel in Greenwood Village together, were in the market for a restaurant when they found out Johnny's was for sale.

Details of the sale weren't available.

Pak said he bought the restaurant with the plan to change very little, if anything about it.

"I like this style," he said, gesturing to the pictures of classic cars and 1950s memorabilia on the walls. "That's why I bought Johnny's. I want to keep the same menu."

The only change Pak said he is considering is adding wraps to the menu. At the deli he and his wife owned in Greenwood Village, the wraps were always a popular item, he said.

But that won't mean taking any of the classics off the menu, he said.

"The burgers and the shakes, everything is the same," he said.

With the economy slumping, it might seem to some that this isn't the right time to buy a new business.

But Pak said he is hopeful about the future.

"The economy is down presently, but I think it's getting better," he said.

And, Pak said, there is plenty of development along Havana and Iliff to help his business grow.

About a mile to the north is The Gardens on Havana, a \$110 million redevelopment project on the site of the old Buckingham Square mall. The first of the large retail shops in the project, a Kohl's department store, is scheduled to open next month. Other stores, including Dick's Sporting Goods are scheduled to open later in the year and officials hope to have plans for residential properties complete this year as well.

To the west is a recently-built shopping center at Parker Road and Iliff.

Gayle Jetchick, executive director of the Havana Business Improvement District, said she was glad to have Pak and his wife in the neighborhood.

"It's nice to have some new blood in the district," she said.

The centerpiece of the BID's work on Havana is the Gardens project and the new businesses it will bring to the area.

But Jetchick said the classic businesses like Johnny's are also important to bringing shoppers to Havana and keeping customers coming back.

"It's our history and any successful restaurant like Johnny's is a good value for the district," she said. "They've been a



Brad Kendrick reads the paper after eating lunch at Johnny's Diner on Feb. 20 near South Havana Street and East Iliff Avenue in Aurora. (Heather A. Longway/The Aurora Sentinel)


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