

Sunday, May 27, 2007

Life takes turn into café

After job loss, Wyoming couple catered to fellow soccer parents

BY VAL PREVISH | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

Typical of many small businesses, Dale and Patty Hipsley's restaurant in Wyoming took shape after corporate downsizing brought the couple to a precipice in their professional lives

The resilient couple, who also live in Wyoming, turned their misfortune into a recipe for success when they opened Half Day Café in March 2006. The 70-seat restaurant has become a big hit in the local community and with diners from miles around, with the restaurant drawing about 1,100 customers each week, according to the owners.

But their road to success wasn't easy - or planned.

Dale was working as an internal leadership development consultant for American Express before he became a restaurateur. In 2002, he fell victim to job cuts spurred by a downturn in business after 9/11. He continued to work in training and development on a contract basis with DaimlerChrysler until 2005.

After much consideration about whether to re-enter the corporate world or try something new, the couple decided that they would open a hospitality business, with Dale drawing upon his past experience as a regional manager with TGI Friday's in Detroit more than 20 years ago. Patty, who was a film and video producer for an ad agency before she quit to have children, has contributed her well-honed cooking skills.

Based on feedback mostly from other parents at soccer games, Dale said the couple decided to open a restaurant that served breakfast and lunch. Opening for breakfast and lunch only would also allow the couple to accommodate the needs of their two young children, Nathaniel, 10, and Ella, 8, and their school schedules.

Reaching that momentous decision was only half the battle, however, said Dale. The couple soon discovered that restaurant real estate is not easy to come by, at least not ideal locations.

The couple said they were lucky to find Half Day Café's current location - the former Le Cézanne restaurant at the corner of Wyoming Avenue and Springfield Pike - because they found out about it just before they were about to sign a lease on another less desirable spot, Dale said.

Dale said a friend informed him of the possible sale of the Le Cézanne building, and by the time Dale contacted the owner a few hours later, several offers were already on the table.

"I didn't give up," said Dale. "Eventually we convinced him that our project was the most feasible for the site, and he sold it to us."

The couple declined to discuss sales or how much they paid for the restaurant.

But they said business has been brisk from the first day.

After extensive renovation, Half Day Café opened on the first Wednesday in March 2006. People from the Wyoming



Dale and Patty Hipsley, owners of the Half Day Café in Wyoming, limit the restaurant's service to breakfast and lunch to work around their children's school hours.

Half Day Café

Address: 1 Wyoming Ave., Wyoming 45215,

513-821-4695

Web site: www.halfdaycafe.org

Owners: Dale and Patty Hipsley

Employees: 20