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Second life for a favorite spot

BY JANET ERWOOD • DENVILLEROCKAWAY THIS WEEK • DECEMBER 24, 2008

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DENVILLE -- If the second time around is always better, then Dennis Gentile would know that firsthand.

ADVERTISEMENT A year and a half after his restaurant, The Second Half, was reduced to rubble in a devastating fire, Gentile has emerged from the ashes with the revival of a new and better Second Half restaurant.

"After the fire I didn't think I would be back in the business," Gentile said. "It is very difficult when something you work hard at for over 20 years is gone in an instant. There is definitely a healing process that has to take place."

During the hiatus, Gentile said, friends and family members, including his wife, Diane, were always urging him to open another restaurant.

One day it all came together for Gentile when a particular incident occurred while his son was in the hospital.

"We were at the hospital for my son for his pre-op and the nurse that was there said to me, 'I met my husband at your place.' That's when I knew that the restaurant met not only a lot to me but so much to so many other people as well," Gentile said.

That is how the Second Half was reborn just a few weeks ago at 17 E. Main St. in Denville.

The new Second Half possesses its own unique style and panache, quite different from the pub style of its predecessor. It has a speakeasy ambiance with an eclectic Manhattan-style chic motif, including an ornate mahogany bar with a black granite top, Venetian plaster walls colored in golden browns and off-whites, wide plank wood floors, black wood moldings, ceilings, and accessories.

Gentile wants to re-create all the comforts and familiarities the customers were used to getting at the old place.

"At the original Second Half customers just loved to come in and hang out and stay for a while because they felt comfortable there and they had friends there, and they also made new friends too," Gentile said. "I wanted to create the same thing I had before, everything that people were familiar with. And what I really want them to know now is that they can have that same comfort level when they come to the new place."

Customers will recognize the familiar faces of 12-year veteran and bartender Tommy Paulikowski and 20-year wait staff employee Diane [\(Christmas\)](#) Butterly.

"Consistency means everything, and I am happy to have most of the same people back. Plus it is a comfort level for the customers to walk in and recognize the staff. It is really great," Gentile said.

Customers who knew what to expect from the old menu can be rest-assured that not much of it has changed. One reason, Gentile said, is that many original staff members including the chefs in the kitchen are back.

"We didn't change the menu much at all and have kept many of our original signature dishes. It is still a pub style menu," Gentile said. "We plan to add a few other items to the menu, and of course we have daily specials that offer even more choices."

Those signature dishes include the abundant steak offerings such as the sizzling sliced sirloin steak with garlic butter; the New York strip steak with melted crumbled blue cheese; steak burgundy with a fresh mushroom and garlic burgundy glaze; and the Second Half's marinated skirt steak.

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Warren Westura / DenvilleRockaway This Week

Steve Shaffer, left, of Denville and wife Michele check out The Second Half on Main in Denville.

THE SECOND HALF ON MAIN

Where: 17 E. Main St., Denville.

Phone: (973) 784-4040.

Hours: Monday-Thursday, 11:30 a.m.-midnight; Friday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m.-2 a.m.; Sunday, noon-midnight.

Cuisine: American and some international.

Liquor: Wine, beer and other alcoholic beverages (at the bar and for dining).

Payment: All credit cards accepted.

Price range: \$7.50-\$23.50; specials may price higher.

Dress: Casual.

The scene: Bar is a popular gathering place for the local neighborhood crowd. Bar also has four flat screen TVs. Also a busy place for diners; there is seating available in both the regular dining area and the bar area. Reservations suggested on weekends.

Atmosphere: Entry doors in a medieval style of architecture lead into a vestibule with French doors that enter into the dining area and bar. The bar is beautifully decorated in rich mahogany, black trim and accessories, low hanging lights and black ceilings.

Dining area has a very intimate atmosphere. It is a chic style eatery with a warm and cozy feel.

Outdoor dining: Yes, weather permitting.

Parking: Street and rear of the building parking lot.

Specials: Take-out; Tuesday night prime rib dinner \$19.50.

Owner: Dennis Gentile.

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Another big draw is the half-pound black-Angus burger with lots of toppings to choose from, including sautéed onions, mushrooms, hot cherry peppers, bacon cheese and more.

Some classic items are the French onion soup, mini crab cakes with horseradish dip, coconut shrimp, roast beef French dip, the reuben, and the hot open faced pastrami melt.

There are many appetizers and a real nice selection of salads, as well as pasta, fish and chicken entrées. Daily specials always include many other selections.

A nice selection of desserts and specialty coffees is offered.

Bar selections include draft and bottled beer, wines by the glass or by the bottle, and many other special drinks and spirits.

"Now my kids are getting involved in the restaurant," Gentile said. "My son DJ's major at school is restaurant management, and my daughter Caitlyn, who is a senior in high school, is also getting involved in the restaurant."

Gentile is pleased to be a part of the town of Denville again and delighted that the new location is right in the middle of town. He said that location really gives him a good sense of community.

"The town and the people of Denville have always been great to me and have supported my business all these years," Gentile said. "I like being in the uptown location in town, as opposed to where I was before on the outskirts of town. There really is a sense of community now. It is a little surreal, but I did it again."

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