

New restaurant owners to make dining a cultural experience

By Janell Bradley
Editor

(Editor's note: Brian Bruening is the son of Larry and Patricia (Wiltgen) Bruening, New Hampton. Patricia is an Ossian native.)

The new owners of Elkader's historic Keystone restaurant, say there were many chapters to the story of two men from Boston choosing the Northeast Iowa community of Elkader as the place where they would advance a new career.

Brian Bruening, 30, a native of New Hampton, worked the past seven years in college admissions. Frederique Fethi Boudouani, 34, has been both a computer engineer and a web page designer. Of French and Algerian heritage, his interest

in how a small Iowa town could in 1846 be named for an Islamic revolutionary, held his interest.

As the George Washington of Algeria's resistance against France in the 1830s, "everything is named for Abd-el-kader," in his home country, says Boudouani.

In late December 2006, the men bought the Keystone, four years after first considering the purchase of the restaurant. Back in 2002, the timing just wasn't right. But Bruening and Boudouani continued to visit Elkader twice a year.

"The very first time we visited Elkader was right after Sept. 11, 2001," says Boudouani. "In Boston, there was hysteria," he says about the reaction to the World Trade Center. But in the small Iowa town they found something more like peace.

"We came here and it was like making a connection to another part of the world," Boudouani said. "The slightest little smell of one's

origins are important to me."

The people of Elkader began encouraging the two men from Boston to give their town a chance. Both Brian and Frederique worked in catering on the East Coast, but have no other restaurant-ownership experience.

"We were starting to develop a circle of friends in Elkader. But the cherry on the topping was how the people here have worked to make their town successful," Boudouani said of the town of just 1,500 people. "There are always cars on Main St."

Renaming the business, "Schera's," they honor Frederique's sister, Scherazad.

In transforming the decor of the restaurant to reflect both Algerian and U.S. cultures, the men commissioned Scherazad, a business woman in London, to purchase authentic Algerian decor for the restaurant. They expect to surprise her when she arrives in the U.S. with their goods, as she doesn't yet know they've named the business for her.

Both men would like to see Elkader capitalize on its sister city relationship with Mascara, Algeria. In 1984, Elkader town leaders traveled to the country in north Africa that is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea, between Morocco and Tunisia. Although they know there is some history on town's relationship with Mascara in the Carter House Museum across the river from the restaurant, they hope to help dinner guests experience the food and culture of another world.

"We want to be more than a restaurant; we want to be a cultural bridge," says Bruening.

When Schera's hosts its grand opening, Saturday, Jan. 20, there will be both traditional and Algerian dishes on the menu.

Boudouani said already, one customer came in and asked, "Can we still get a hamburger in this place?" to which he replied, "Of course you can!"

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Church Notes

CALMAR

Calmar Comm. Methodist Church
will have worship services Sundays at 9
a.m. with fellowship following.

**St. Aloysius Catholic Church- Sat-
urdays** 4:30 p.m. Worship. **Sundays**
10:30 Worship.

Calmar Lutheran, Sundays, 9 a.m.
Worship; 10 a.m. Sunday School.

**Trinity Lutheran Church ELS/
WELS,** Sunday worship 10:30 a.m.;
Sunday school 9:30 a.m.

CASTALIA

Zion Lutheran- Wednesdays, 4:15
p.m. God's Disciples Choir Practice;
Sundays, 8:15 a.m. Confirmation Class;
9:15 a.m. Sunday School; 10:30 a.m.
Worship Service.

FESTINA

**Our Lady of Seven Dolors Catholic
Church- Sunday** Worship is at 9 a.m.

FORT ATKINSON

St. John Nepomucene will hold wor-
ship service at 4 p.m. on Saturdays.

FRANKVILLE

Frankville Presbyterian will hold
worship service at 10:30 a.m.

Bethlehem will hold worship service
at 9 a.m.

Professional

Menu items in the future might include a thick, vegetable stew served over cous cous, or a hamburger-rice mixture served in stuffed vegetables. For those unfamiliar with Mediterranean or African cuisine, Bruening says, "Algerian cooking is the most Midwestern-like of all the north African regions. Spices are used for flavor, but not intensity."

The north African region of which Algeria is a part, is known for its pastries, they said, and some of those, such as a rich flaky food

Schera's, cont. on page 10

Schera's,

cont. from page 2

similar to Greek baklava, may eventually show up on the menu or buffet line as well.

As part of the transition to new owners, the business closed after Christmas and reopened New Year's Eve with a gala event in conjunction with the local theater. Those who bought tickets to the movie, 'Casino Royale,' received a playing card they were encouraged to match with another's to form a winning poker hand, later at Schera's.

"We really enjoyed the New Year's Eve event," said Boudouani. "We want to work with the other businesses in this community as much as possible," he said of coordinating events and activities to help Elkader become a 'destination' for travelers and Iowans seeking a cultural experience.

"It really pays off to help each other in a small town," said Frederique. "I'm reinvesting my assets in my community when I buy a window at UBC or the local lumberyard rather than at (a larger business in an urban area)." Buying locally "feeds everybody," he says.

From Schera's patio, the views are many, including Clayton County's historic courthouse, a keystone bridge over the Turkey River, and the relatively new river walkway on the opposite side of the river.

Schera's is open Monday through Friday, from 11-2:30 for lunch; Wednesdays and Thursdays from 5:30-8 p.m. for dinner and 5:30-9 p.m. for dinner Saturdays and Sundays.

The bar is open from 4-9 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays, and from 4-11 p.m. or closing, Fridays and Saturdays.



Frederique Boudouani and Brian Bruening are partners in the ownership of Schera's – the restaurant formerly known as the Keystone, in Elkader. The men had been living in Boston, although Bruening is a New Hampton native. The grand opening of the business is this weekend, featuring old favorites of Keystone customers, as well as new menu items from Algeria. Boudouani is of Algerian heritage, and Elkader shares a sister-city relationship with Mascara, Algeria. (Photo by Janell Bradley.)