

La Cappell's closing its doors less than month after its debut

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Kathy and Joseph Lujan had big dreams and no fears opening their new restaurant La Cappella's during the pandemic.

However, less than a month later, the couple realized there were too many factors aligned against them to keep their doors open. La Cappella's will close permanently as soon as the excess food stock and inventory are sold off.

Joseph said many factors led them to realize not long after their opening Aug. 15 they were in over their head.

The first was structural. For example, the Ansul system, a fire extinguishing system required in industrial kitchens, hadn't been inspected since 2008.

"That was over \$4,000 right off the bat," Joshua said.

Then there were the electrical and plumbing issues.

“We had Swede Company Electric come up here and look at it,” Joshua said. “He looked at it and said, ‘Oh my God. You guys are so under powered.’ The breakers were heating up. Both panels needed to be replaced. We’re talking major amounts of money that should have been done a long time ago.”

And as head chef, Kathy admits her goals were too ambitious.

“Part of the problem was my fault, too. We had a big menu. And everything is made from scratch,” Kathy said. “Maybe I should have started off smaller. But I wanted to please everybody. Even with the menu I had, people were like, ‘Oh, you don’t have this?’”

As much as a buzz was created by a new restaurant in town, the opening proved to ill timed.

“There are still a certain percentage of people uncomfortable to step out during COVID,” Joshua explained. “And the fires didn’t help. Nobody wanted to go out after they said shelter in place. That was a week of revenue we lost.”

“We were busy, but not busy enough. With the amount of staff we had,” Kathy said, pointing to their greatest expense in labor costs to keep 13 full-time employees, “we needed to do at least, net, \$3,000 a day. Instead they were averaging \$2,200 and on slow days \$1,500.”

Joshua said if they had more money, they would wait out the slow start if they could.

“But you can’t fight COVID, number one. And number two, you can’t fight a building that has major issues and we have no control over,” he said.

This week Kathy slowly tabulated sales of the remaining food stuffs and supplies, from the meats and cheeses out of the deli counter to shelves of cleaning and cooking stock. She had to sell her brand new oven last week, still on a pallet, wrapped in plastic, at a loss.

Kathy also started up a GoFundMe page to raise \$500 to qualify for a matching Federal Small Business Relief grant. To contribute, find the link on the La Cappellas Facebook page.

The couple plans to learn from the situation and try again at another location sometime in the near future.

In the meantime, Kathy plans to try her hand at catering orders, going to people’s houses.

“I’m going to take the most popular items that we sold and go from there,” she said. “There’s a reason why things happen, I believe that. This is a lesson for us. It also told us, don’t buy this building. It also showed us what the community loves.”

“It’s the American dream,” Joshua added. “You get knocked down, you get back up. This is the greatest country on Earth, regardless who is running it. There’s opportunity. And we love this city. We’re going nowhere. We want to spend the rest of our lives here.”

