

THE WINCHESTER STAR

Community support helps Lucia Ristorante in Winchester overcome coronavirus pandemic

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Were it not for the outpouring of support from the community, Lucia Ristorante would be in trouble, according to Philip Frattaroli, one of the owners of the family-owned Italian restaurant.

Acknowledging that the past year has been “a horrific experience” for the restaurant industry, he said Lucia’s is weathering the pandemic with resilience and a dedicated following in the community.

“It’s meant a lot,” said Frattaroli.

Opened in 1985, Lucia’s is a local Winchester institution. The restaurant serves food from the Abruzzo region of Italy, where the Frattarolis own an olive grove, Philip said.

The restaurant was cited in a local paper for its Valentine’s Day specials, including several entrees and a gift box stuffed with bubbles, chocolates, cheeses, and a gift card.

Frattaroli has been relying mostly on take-out since the state imposed a 25% capacity on indoor dining, and the directive to socially distance from others.

Lucia’s sister restaurant in Boston’s North End hasn’t been as fortunate, owing to the lack of tourists over the summer for sidewalk dining, and the drastic cutback in the number of indoor customers.

But he feels he’s been lucky especially in Winchester.

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“We didn’t want to hibernate or turn employees out,” said Philip.

He's buying less food, which has brought the cost of operating the restaurant down, but the rent is fixed and unchanged, so he's had to find savings elsewhere. He's had to cut back on employee shifts, but he's found success by beefing up the takeout menu with some popular items such as salad dressing and tomato sauce.

"The salad dressing went like gangbusters," he said.

Last month, an employee tested positive for COVID-19, prompting a temporary closure to thoroughly sanitize the space. But Lucia's has reopened, according to a social media post.

"From checking temperatures at the door to requiring our staff to take biweekly COVID tests, we are committed to going above what is required by our local Health Departments," the Frattarolis wrote in a social media post.

Looking toward the future, Philip is optimistic that by the summer, things will look back to normal.

"We should get back outdoors and be in good shape," he said. "We will keep the takeout going and continue to be welcoming."