
Carmelina's restaurant in Hadley, bought by former dishwasher, reborn as Alina's



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HADLEY – When Martin Amaya arrived in Western Massachusetts from El Salvador in 1994, he needed a job. Any job. Just 18, he used some family connections and landed at Mezza Luna, a Northampton restaurant run by Damien DiPaolo.

A hard worker, Amaya took on more and more responsibilities as he learned the business, and DiPaolo, who also owned **Carmelina's** in Hadley, rewarded him.

"I'd bake from 4 a.m. to 2 p.m., go home and nap, then work as a dishwasher at Carmelina's," Amaya recalled.

Last month, Amaya came full circle, buying Carmelina's and reopening it on Nov. 1 as Alina's.

Now the boss, Amaya, 37, knows virtually every aspect of the restaurant business as well as every nook and cranny at Alina's. And he learned it all the hard way. Washing dishes. Making salads. Managing staff. By 1999, he was running Mezza Luna, which has since closed. By 2001, he was head chef at Carmelina's. He took to it all from the first.

"I fell in love with cooking and baking," he said.

When DiPaolo **sold Carmelina's** to David and Debbie Windoloski in 2007, Amaya bought 15 percent of the business.

"It didn't work out," he said. "I was unhappy."

He took his restaurant skills and opened the first **Alina's** in Deerfield, which he ran with his wife, Maritza Amaya-Branche. They named it after their daughter, Alina, now nine.

Amaya jumped at the chance to buy Carmelina's back from the Windoloskis. He brought back some of the old crew, including the piano player and bartender who worked there under DiPaolo. He has also taken the menu from his Deerfield restaurant, Italian dishes he has honed over the years, and installed it at Carmelina's. He brought his restaurant's name, as well.

Amaya is still looking for new parking spaces, a chronic problem at the Hadley site. Judging by his early business, he'll need them.

"Business is awesome," he said. "The numbers are crazy. It's nice that I've come back to where I started."
