



Rig A Tony's owner Lisa DeSisto displays one of her signature meatball subs.

'A brand-new canvas'

Rig A Tony's cooking up a fresh look and location

What a year it has been for restaurants. Much of 2020 has been full of challenges for many, including those with a big passion for food and the hope of bringing that passion to customers.

For Lisa DeSisto, the past year has also offered successful growth, support and community spirit, as she works to continue to do what she loves. DeSisto is the owner of Rig A Tony's, which has two locations in Derry and a new Windham spot opening this spring at 13 Rockingham Road.

She also operates Derry's popular Clam Haven.

"It was a challenging year," DeSisto says, "but also a great year."

Those challenges included a fire in May 2020 that gutted a portion of her flagship West Broadway business in Derry. "Since the fire, I took the time to figure out what I wanted to do," DeSisto says, adding that it was an opportunity to take a deep breath and "have a brand-new canvas of what I wanted the restaurant to be."

She studied the past two decades of her business that sprouted at that downtown Derry location and decided to move forward with new ideas, new spaces and a new outlook on how she wanted to operate her business moving forward.

After the fire, Rig A Tony's continued to operate its locations at 3 Rockingham Road in Windham and at 14 South Ave. in Derry, an Italian marketplace with a variety of grab-and-go hot foods.

By JULIE HUSS • Photos by TIM JEAN



Lisa DeSisto holds architectural plans as she talks about her vision for the new Rig A Tony's opening this spring in a former garage at 13 Rockingham Road in Windham.



A drawing shows what Rig A Tony's in Windham will look like when the renovations are complete.

However, those locations have since closed – Windham at the end of December and Derry temporarily in March – so that DeSisto could focus on rebuilding the flagship Derry location and readying her new Windham establishment.

As of the end of April, the plan was to have the Windham spot open in mid-May and 38 West Broadway reopened by early summer.

Meanwhile, DeSisto's expansion has also included taking over the popular seafood icon Clam Haven, which she purchased last year from Rick Metts, who operated it for more than three decades. On March 17, Clam Haven celebrated



The new space for Rig A Tony's, just a few doors down from its current Windham location, will have an open design. The main doors will face the Windham Rail Trail.

its spring opening day with a ribbon-cutting, blessing of the building and plenty of fried fish favorites to go around.

Mixing things up

With a strong commitment to continue the original, successful Rig A Tony's model – offering her family-oriented

Italian favorites for both takeout and catering – DeSisto has decided to rebrand herself, with a new business model, logos and marketing strategies.

"We took the time to figure out what we wanted to look like for the next 20 years," she says. "I want the next 20 years to be just as good."



Glazed lemon bread cools on a baker's rack at Rig A Tony's Italian Takeout in Derry.

As the new Windham space evolves, it will include fresh updates on some traditional favorites. There will also be more choices on the menu, like adding more vegetarian options, new recipes and an expanded Italian bakery.

The new space features a multilevel, open design, allowing customers to see the kitchen staff in action.

Fresh takeout options will still be a strong point, as will catering and delivery. Additionally, DeSisto hopes to continue her cooking classes.

"It will give me more time to share my passion with people," she says. "And the Windham location will give us the opportunity to do more widespread catering."



Clam Haven owner Lisa DeSisto, center, lifts up part of the ribbon while celebrating the opening of a new season at the Derry landmark in March.

DeSisto loves being in Windham.

"I really love the area," she says, adding that the new space is close to the Windham Rail Trail.

DeSisto says that she is also grateful for her staff, who have supported her on the journey to the next level.

She is proud of the fact that with all the COVID-19 challenges, she was able to keep her employees on the payroll.

DeSisto says that her business at Rig A

Tony's has always been very community-oriented. She will continue that effort in her new locations, in both Derry and Windham.

For DeSisto, Clam Haven's recent opening day was an extension of the support that she has had for many years from family, friends and the community.

"I treat customers as family, as if you were coming to my home," she says. "I love my community so much."



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