

Pizza Corner to lose an icon

January 18, 2012 - 7:57pm BY COLLEEN COSGROVE BUSINESS REPORTER



Donair and pizza slice lovers will have until May 31 to get them at King of Donair at Halifax's Pizza Corner. That's when KoD is closing that location. (THE CHRONICLE HERALD)

Halifax's legendary Pizza Corner will lose one of its own this spring.

After more than 20 years in operation, May 31 will mark the final night King of Donair will serve up its famed mega-sized pizza slices and loaded donairs from its downtown location at 1560 Grafton St.

On Tuesday evening, a battle in small claims court played out between King of Donair owner Bassam Nahas and landlord John Manolopoulos regarding compensation for renovations Nahas funded.

In an interview Wednesday, Nahas likened the scenario to a nasty divorce.

"None of this is fun to go through. Life is too short and I just want this over with. I won't say we were evicted. Our lease comes to an end on May 31 and landlord and tenant could not see eye to eye."

The Chronicle Herald contacted Manolopoulos by phone Wednesday, but he declined to comment on the matter.

Nahas, meantime, said he contributed about \$10,000 to upgrade the aging property, but its problems run much deeper. The business was shut down for three months in 2010 after construction crews discovered major plumbing issues, as well as rotten subfloors and floor joists. To date Nahas said near \$40,000 has been spent on plumbing, flooring and electrical upgrades, to name a few expenses.

"There are many structural problems with the building. At the time, the landlord refused to participate (i

the renovation costs), but he said we'd be compensated after the insurance claim.

"I found out later that bills were outstanding, but he'd been paid by the insurance company and had been receiving our rent."

That is when the matter went to small claims court, with Nahas seeking the maximum allowable amount of \$25,000 from Manolopoulos.

Adjudicator Michael O'Hara reserved his decision Tuesday, but Nahas said regardless of the outcome, he is getting out of 1560 Grafton St.

"I've already spent the money and the building requires a lot more maintenance. He says it's my responsibility, but I cannot accept that. It hasn't even been painted since we moved in and it's haggard outside.

"Tired and old is not the image I want my business to represent in 21st-century downtown."

Manolopoulos took over ownership of the Grafton Street building after his father, Constantine (Gus) Manolopoulos, died in 2000. Gus had purchased the property and opened the Hillcrest Grill in 1959. King of Donair moved into the space in the late 1980s.

Shortly after Manolopoulos took over from his father, Nahas said his rent nearly doubled. That is another reason he is not fighting to keep the King of Donair legacy alive at Pizza Corner.

"(Gus) was like family to me, but now we have higher rents than others in the area. It's very hard right now for any business to make it downtown.

"Pizza Corner has changed. There's more competition and the bar business isn't as strong. ... If you don't sharpen your pencils and present a cleaner image, you're going to be left in a disadvantage. We didn't want it to come to that."

But that is not enough for Nahas, who operates 10 King of Donair outlets in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, to turn his back on the idea of operating a King of Donair outlet in downtown Halifax.

"We regret not to be there for the customers, but if there is a location that comes available that's suitable to serve our customers downtown, then we'll be there."

Nahas and Manolopoulos return to small claims court Jan. 31 regarding what Manolopoulos said was related to unpaid taxes.

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