

The Miami Herald

July 9, 2007

Circulation: 312,109

Chefs from Big Apple find love, business success on Flagler

Horacio Oliveira proposed marriage to his wife, Jennifer Porciello, as they were strolling down Flagler Street.

The chefs, who own La Loggia restaurant, a popular Italian restaurant at 68 W. Flagler St., are Manhattan exiles (she moved to the city after growing up in Long Island; Brazilian-born Oliveira lived in Manhattan for a decade).

They were fortunate enough to get attractive rent and a long-term lease and were strategic in opening directly across from the Dade County Courthouse.

"From Day One, we were packed," says Oliveira, 48. "If I would open another restaurant, it would be downtown."

La Loggia — where Jose Goyanes, another downtown entrepreneur, also is a partner — is popular with judges, lawyers, bankers and other downtown professionals, including staffers from Macy's, which has its Florida headquarters on Flagler.

BIG GAMBLE

Though Oliveira and Porciello are experienced restaurant operators, he said borrowing from a bank wasn't feasible, given the high failure rate for eateries — especially in a high-risk venture downtown. They mortgaged their home and borrowed from relatives to launch the restaurant, spending about \$1 million, says Oliveira.

Before opening, they spent

nine months gutting the restaurant, installing new electricity and plumbing, and executing a major overhaul. They raised the low ceilings to 18 feet, added windows and gave a face-lift to the entrance with French doors. Out went the red-and-white tablecloths and carpeting. They decorated the interior with frescos and Roman columns. Mosaics dress up the floor. They hung photos of Porciello's Italian forefathers on the walls.

The lunch and dinner menus include starters like bruschetta and beef carpaccio and offer daily specials. And the restaurant does catering and delivery.

UNIQUE BUSINESS

There is little competition for a fine meal in the neighborhood. Still, the couple is constantly working on improving the business. They travel to New York and Italy scouting for ideas and keep changing the menu to stay current on trends in Italian food.

The place is bustling during lunch Monday through Friday and has a busy happy hour Friday nights. And business is boosted by private parties and those attending shows downtown. But Saturday and Sunday, it's closed, except for parties and special events.

In 2006, Oliveira and Porciello opened a sidewalk cafe that has drawn more attention to the spot and helps



PHOTOS BY CHARLES TRAINOR JR./MIAMI HERALD STAFF

POPULAR RESTAURANT: La Loggia, above, is bustling during lunch Monday through Friday and has a busy happy hour Friday nights. Below are husband-and-wife owners Horacio Oliveira and Jennifer Porciello.

'From Day One, we were packed. If I would open another restaurant, it would be downtown.'

—HORACIO OLIVEIRA,
co-owner of La Loggia restaurant



attract more casually-dressed customers who may feel reluctant to venture into an upscale spot.

They acknowledge the downtown location has drawbacks. Vagrants sometimes wander in the restaurant and panhandle. "We wish there were more police," says Porciello. And the usual difficulty of attracting good employees is exacerbated by the restau-

rant's five-day work week. "A lot of people want to work six days," she adds.

Though parking downtown is generally a hassle, they have a deal with the

parking lot next door and offer patrons evening parking for \$2. "It helps a lot," says Oliveira.

—MARTHA BRANNIGAN

CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT BY THE NUMBERS

- Hotel rooms: 5,135
- Planned hotel rooms: 1,163
- Annual visitors: 11.6 million
- Annual cruise passengers: 3.6 million
- Total existing office space, Classes A-C: 16.3 million square feet
- Office space under construction: 1.3 million square feet
- Office space under construction, with surrounding areas: 1.9 million square feet

- Daytime population (employees): 193,940
- Average income: \$62,600
- Condo units under construction: 4,985
- Condo units under construction, including surrounding areas: 18,300
- Condo units completed, 2002-present: 196
- Condo units completed, including surrounding areas, 2002-present: 3,893

SOURCE: Miami Downtown Development Authority

DOWNTOWN: ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

- \$8 billion existing tax base projected to grow to \$22 billion by 2015
- 900 percent increase in building permits issued between 2000 and 2005
- 6.7 million square feet of Class A office space
- 26 foreign consulates and 15 foreign trade offices

SOURCE: Miami Downtown Development Authority