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Die-hard Immigrant Chef Re-Launches Caribbean Cuisine Destination

Determined chef won't let seismic upgrades keep her from cooking

Oakland, Calif., March 31, 2003 — Judith O'Loughlin, owner and operator of a long-time fixture on MacArthur Boulevard in Oakland, won't be kept down. In January of this year, Judith was evicted when the building she leased space in was closed for seismic upgrades. Now, with the help of a silent partner, she's planning to come back bigger and stronger than ever in a new location.

Judith, a native of the Caribbean island of Nevis, a smaller sister island to St. Kitts located in the leeward islands of the Eastern Caribbean, is a survivor. In 1983, she immigrated to the United States as a housewife. After that, she worked two jobs to put herself through college while single-handedly raising two children, now aged 15 and 16. In 1998, she opened "J&J Caribbean Kitchen" on MacArthur Boulevard in Oakland's Dimond district, offering authentic Caribbean cuisine to what became a loyal following of customers either taking food "to go" or competing for one of the six stools at her kitchen counter. Catering supplemented her income from the small restaurant, and is currently her only source of income. Says Judith, "It was really out of my control that the city came in and shut down the building I was in. Now I'm having to use a shared kitchen to support my catering until I can get established in a new location."

Now, armed with a new business plan, a new partner and fresh financing, Judith is gearing up to re-build her small take-out kitchen as

a new and improved Caribbean destination. Judith figures that with the economic downturn, Bay area residents will welcome a Caribbean “escape” without the expense of boarding a plane to the tropics. Further, Judith notes that Bay area Caribbean-themed events such as The San Francisco Carnaval or Reggae in the Park attract a diverse audience that includes people of all ages from a wide range of cultures. As Judith says “Everyone, no matter where they’re from, can find something to enjoy in Caribbean food.”

Judith figures that Jamaican culture will figure prominently in her new enterprise, because of its universal recognition. However, countries from all over the Caribbean islands enjoy mostly the same foods and dishes, so a “Caribbean” theme does the best justice to her fare. Beyond this, Judith is keeping the details of her plans, and the date of her grand opening, a secret.

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