



BARI NEWS



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Entrepreneurs at heart

Sam Samuelian and Stepan Panosian have put their hearts and souls into their business.

By Frale Oyen

For the Bari News

You'll be lucky if you can get Sam Samuelian and Stepan Panosian, the owners of Square One, in the same place, at the same time.

That's because with the opening of the Square One outlet at the airport last Thursday – the same day the pair won the contract to provide cafeteria services to the U.S. Embassy Yerevan – they have had precious little time to sit down and relax.

The two have spent the best part of last week shuttling between Zvartnots International Airport and the U.S. Embassy and this week will be no different. Their immediate focus, they say, is to effectively provide the services required at their new outlets whilst maintaining the high standard of service offered at its existing facilities.

"It has been tough," Sam admits. "Although..."

"The tougher the better," Stepan adds. "We enjoy it more."

Best friends since they met in 1994-1995 whilst studying business administration at the American University of Beirut, Stepan and Sam are so close they often tend to finish each other's sentences.

The pair are confident of their abilities to grow the business but they know that the next couple of weeks will be difficult – maybe not as challenging as when they opened Square One on Abovyan Street on Aug. 1, 2004 – but tough nonetheless.

They have noted the grumblings of Mission personnel unhappy that there has been little more than sandwiches available to those coming into the Embassy cafeteria after 1pm and they hope to rectify this problem in the next couple of weeks.

"We're restocking and restarting the engines at the U.S. Embassy cafeteria," says Stepan, 30, noting that "until we received the call last week, we had assumed that we would be leaving on June 2 so we had begun phasing out our operation. Now that we're returning, we need to phase it all back in."

On March 29, Square One stepped in to temporarily manage the U.S. Embassy's cafeteria services after the vendor contracted to do the job left. However, when its bid for the Embassy's cafeteria and events catering services came in second, Square One slowly began to downscale its operations. Then they got the call to stay. It seemed that the employee association was unable to negotiate a final agreement with its first choice.



"We thought we were leaving so we had to retreat in an organized manner," says Sam, 29. "Now that they told us that we're back in, we have to come back in an organized manner. ... We have to reformulate our strategies. We know what the Embassy wants; we need to see how we're going to provide it."

"We're still in the planning stage of how we are going to manage it," Stepan says. "At the end of this week, we should have a final picture of how we are going to do it, a better understanding of how many hours will be spent where. It will definitely include at least one of us being there a lot of the time."

Although the pair are quite happy to delegate tasks once the business has been established – they meet regularly with the managers of Square One on Abovyan Street and the American University of Armenia Business Center cafeteria on Alex Manoogian Street — when it comes to opening a new branch they are very hands on.

"We've put our hearts and souls into the business," Stepan says.

"We worked a long time without getting any money from this just to make sure it keeps going and now this year it has blossomed," says Sam. "It's a rewarding process — emotionally, spiritually, psychologically — to provide a service that makes people happy."

“We have to go out into the battlefield and fight alongside our soldiers, our staff. We can't just sit in our map room and strategize and let things happen.”

— Stepan Panosian