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Ann Arbor's famed Hippie Hash comes to Lansing

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Ann Arbor's famed Hippie Hash comes to Lansing

By DANIEL STURM

For those of you who wish Lansing had more great hangout joints like Ann Arbor, this news is going to make you happy. The Fleetwood Diner, serving "Hippie Hash" around the clock, has opened in Lansing.

And for those who don't particularly like the Ann Arbor scene □ don't worry. The Fleetwood, 2211 S. Cedar St. (the former Great Lakes Diner), isn't exactly a clone of the one in Ann Arbor, except perhaps for the shiny stainless steel panels on the outside walls of both restaurants.

The history of the Ann Arbor hippie restaurant goes back to the post-World War II period, when a steel and porcelain diner "kit" was trucked in from the Dagwood Diner Co. of Toledo, Ohio. Opened in 1949 as the Dagwood Diner, and renamed the Fleetwood in 1971, the little downtown diner was also Ann Arbor's first sidewalk cafe.

Fleetwood co-owner George Fotiadis says with 3,000 square feet, the Fleetwood Diner in Lansing, which opened Tuesday, is three times as large as the diner on Liberty Street in Ann Arbor, where seating can sometimes be cramped.

"Here we're going to have more stuff than in any other place we ever had, because we have a lot more room," Fotiadis, said.

Fotiadis was born in Zimbabwe, where his parents had emigrated to from Greece in the 1970s. At age 7, Fotiadis immigrated to Michigan with his family.

He said the Lansing menu offers additional dinner and breakfast items, milk shakes and chocolate malts that aren't available in Ann Arbor or at the only other Fleetwood, which is in Ypsilanti. "At the other locations, our main thing is the breakfast and the Hippie Hash. Sixty-five percent of our business there is associated with ordering something like that."

Hippie Hash is the Fleetwood's fabled meal, a dizzying fry-up of shredded potatoes, onions, tomatoes and broccoli all bound together with feta cheese and some kind of meat if you want it.

The dish's name alludes to the origins of the Fleetwood Diner in 1971, when it was the hangout of prophets and bums, beatniks and hippies (John Sinclair and Bob Seger ate there) and a host of Ann Arbor characters.

But Fotiadis says he certainly doesn't want to re-create the image of the Fleetwood in Lansing, because a diner can only represent the area it's in. "The people from Lansing will create the atmosphere."

Fotiadis, 30, has recently moved to Lansing with his wife, Sonya Pake, 24, and business partner Steve Ramani, 31, to get the project started. "I think we're going to make a big change to the area."

He hopes the Lansing Fleetwood can draw a diverse crowd from across the area, not only due to the reputation but as a result of its menu and service. Fotiadis has 40 people on his Lansing staff, compared with 25 in Ann Arbor and eight in Ypsilanti.

Aside from classic home-style diner meals, such as Goulash, country-fried steak, meatloaf, and roast beef, the Fleetwood offers meet cooked on a charcoal boiler and flaming cheese. The diner also offers homemade soups and homemade French fries, which Fotiadis said is a "big job." "I'm sure nobody around here has that."

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