LIBERTYVILLE

It Takes a Greek Town

The defining moment in the history of Denver's Greek Town passed unnoticed a few years back, when the last of the original restaurants closed its doors and was replaced by Fire Mountain and an array of Asian, Mexican, and Caribbean eateries.

Diakonia, proprietor of a Greek restaurant on East Colfax Avenue, had already managed to earn two James Beard nominations and set its offshoot as part of the city's culinary scene. Its menu featured such Greek specialties as spanakopita and moussaka, but also included rice, pickerelmeat tacos, baked lasagna and crab enchiladas—a pointed little, if delicious, reminder that the neighborhood was no longer Greek in any meaningful sense. But the area still boasted two gold leaf signs, and blue and white, and was envisioned. This was particularly galling, since it happened to be the sidewalk outside the restaurant where the former Golden Bell Diner, stringedly remembered, Greekness Cafe.

Diakonia was adamant. The sidewalk had to be blue and white. Blue and white are the colors of the Greek flag. They are the colors of the international flag that was flown by an ancient Mediterranean city, the colony of a sun-drenched Hellenic Republic to which Greek Town, Denver, is the closest approximation. Blue and white are the colors of Greek Town, and they are the colors of Greek Town, Denver.

"They say, 'Blue and white, that's not our theme,' Diakonia recalls. "I say, Yeah, but you never had a Greek Town."

The city agreed to turn the gold squares into blue ones. That was when Takis Diakonia—Tom, to his friends—began his two-commission-free fast food venture, which he called, in his something.

"I do feel it's going to be a second Colfax," he says. "The city is behind us. The city wants to make this area a destination." Diakonia's Greek Dogs differ mildly with the colors. It serves the Greek dog in a pita with tzatziki, onions and tomatoes.

For Diakonia, the concession was one more step toward the realization of a dream he's been chasing for more than six years, ever since he took over the Golden Bell. It practically across the street from another Greek restaurant, Pete Contreras's Opera Plaza, which was the neighborhood's last Greek restaurant before Diakonia's arrival. Contreras's street is that much altered stretch of Colfax Opera space remained, a gaping reserved stands, chose and the bones and the boulders, gut the city to put up a fence around it. Contreras's Opera Plaza, however, remained open, and he was fighting Tom's signing, Greekness Cooking, money pumping from outside the city.

"I'm thinking more like what they go in Chicago or Detroit," Diakonia says. "In Chicago, it took forty years to build, and it's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. All the thing to start a Greek Town in Denver. It's a metropolitan city, and why isn't there place in the United States, but Greek Town? Why not in Denver?"

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A special designation for a healthy ethnic neighborhood is hardly a new idea. Since 1970, Denver has had a Chinatown, which is now a Vietnamese and Chinese Asian Gateway Village. What is startling about Denver's Greek Town is that it represents the use of an ethnic label to further economic development along a historical Colfax corridor. It also underscored a little Greekness in the city's overall community.

Officially, Greek Town encompasses the block between Colorado and St. Paul streets, and Colfax and Ninth Avenue. Unofficially, it's the area that the Greek Town Business Council Greek" sign across from East High School and the "Greek" sign outside the Executive Inn, halfway between the parking restroom. But the current Greek content is not the only one. Greek Town's Greekness is a mixture of Greek, Latin, and Anglo Saxon Italian, where a few old diners, a few Greek restaurants, a few Greek bakeries, a few bookstores and wash-them-dress with thick, sweet coffee.

The rest of Greek Town consists of these antique stores, an electronics store, a entertainment office, a remote shop, a hair salon, a TV repair shop, a Greek-owned-and-operated Chinese restaurant, a Greek-owned-and-operated Mexican restaurant, a Greek-owned-and-operated Chinese restaurant, and a Greek-owned-and-operated Mexican restaurant, and a Greek-owned-and-operated Mexican restaurant, and a Greek-owned-and-operated Mexican