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## Smith's Restaurant's longtime run is ending

By Danielle Sanzone, The Record

COHOES — An original Conway player piano from the 1930s, a large red leather booth across from the front bar and black-and-white photos placed throughout Smith's Restaurant — one can only imagine the political leaders of the past who gathered here to discuss the future of the city.

"Many things that cannot be printed happened in those booths," said Eunice Antonucci, co-owner of Smith's Restaurant, which will close its doors to the public on June 7, though the Antonucci's hope to find a new owner who will carry on the restaurant's community-oriented tradition.

Antonucci and her daughter, Margaret Kehn, have operated the historic restaurant since Oct. 14, Margaret's birthday, 1981.

Antonucci's two sons originally made the purchase, but left after a few years to pursue other careers.

Now, with her retirement from the restaurant business, Eunice plans to take a lot of time to relax and see her family.

"We started this business together. We are going to end it together," said Antonucci.

Kehn, the chef for the eatery, plans to pursue a new career, possibly with Albany County.

"I'm very excited about possibly having a 9-to 5 job and having holidays off," she said. "I haven't been able to have a holiday off in a very long time. But I will miss cooking for everyone. It might be nice to not have to cook on demand, though."

The history of the 171 Remsen St structure began when it was built in 1873. It originally served as a silent movie theatre and a pool hall. Then, around the turn of the 20th century, it was converted into a tavern.

In 1937, Michael "Big Mike" Smith, a former Cohoes Democratic leader, purchased the establishment and it became the unofficial Democratic headquarters in the city.

A further testament to the restaurant's affiliation with politics, the 50-foot bar in the restaurant, estimated to be worth around \$100,000, was brought from Tammany Hall in New York City which was home to the New York City Democratic Party. The African mahogany bar, inlaid with walnut wood, was once believed to be the largest bar north of New York City.

Along with history literally being made in the bar with local political get-togethers, the restaurant holds many fond memories for Antonucci.

“I will miss seeing my friends. I am a people person. I love when people randomly stop by,” said the Cohoes native and theatre lover who is a regular at the Cohoes Music Hall down the street from the restaurant.

Mayor John McDonald said, “Eunice is a special person in the history of Cohoes. She is a piece of the fabric here and a great example of our community. I am happy for her and Margaret since they are moving on to the next chapter of their lives. I wish them well. It is sad to see the Antonucci chapter of Smith’s Restaurant come to an end but, at the same token, I know someone will come through to pick up the tradition.”

One of Eunice’s claims to local fame is that she was there when the mayor was born. “I saw him before his own mother,” said the former nurse at the old Cohoes Memorial Hospital.

Photos of influential people in the community, including the mayor, cover the walls and decorative tables of the restaurant. Pictures of BubbaSparks — a racehorse owned by Margaret — line the wall and mirrors of the bar. And photos of celebrities like Jimmy Buffet are placed near the 150-year-old Japanese palace urns which stand five feet tall on the bar’s back shelf.

The mother and daughter duo strongly recommend that people make reservations in these final weeks. They also noted that the restaurant, with a large Italian food selection to showcase the Antonucci’s heritage, will be closed Friday through Monday during Memorial Day weekend.

Eunice and Margaret have hopes of coming back when the restaurant has a new owner, so they can frequent the eatery from the point of view of a hungry client.

“I really hope we can find someone to keep up the tradition of this restaurant,” said Eunice. “One day I’d like to come back and eat here.”

Margaret joked, “That should be part of the purchase agreement when we sell it — we should have our own table always reserved for us.”