



SHUTTERED RANCHO SANTA FE RESTAURANT TO REOPEN FRIDAY



The dining room of the former Ponsaty's fine-dining restaurant, which closed Sunday in Rancho Santa Fe. The restaurant will reopen on Aug. 18 as Nick & G's, a moderately priced Italian restaurant serving housemade pasta, flatbreads, steaks and seafood. (K.C. Alfred / San Diego Union-Tribune)

Rancho Santa Fe's year-old fine-dining restaurant Ponsaty's closed on Sunday, but those doors won't be closed for long. On Friday, the building will reopen as a mid-priced Italian restaurant called Nick & G's.

Grand Restaurant Group, which leases the 1920s-era building in the affluent community's downtown, decided to close Ponsaty's after a split last month with its namesake chef, Patrick Ponsaty, who had worked as the company's corporate chef for the past four years.

Ponsaty's restaurant, at 6106 Paseo Delicias, had specialized in food from the Basque regions of France and Spain. The menu featured many signature dishes that the French-born chef, Ponsaty, had perfected in more than 20 years cooking at San Diego-area restaurants.

The restaurant's new culinary theme is Mediterranean/Italian, with a menu developed by executive chef Brian Freerksen, who formerly worked at Urge Gastropub & Common House, La Jolla Beach & Tennis Club and Paradise Point Resort & Spa in San Diego.

The new menu will feature flatbreads and house-made pasta dishes ranging from \$15-\$26 and steak, pork and seafood entrees priced from \$22 to \$31. Specialties will include pata cabra cheese ravioli, pappardelle Bolognese and three-cheese roasted vegetable flatbread.

Grand Restaurant Group is owned by Sandra DiCicco, who has run the family-style DiCicco Italian Restaurant company in California's Central Valley for more than 30 years.

The new Rancho Santa Fe location is named after DiCicco's two adult children, Nicolas and Gianina.

The closure of Ponsaty's this month came as a shock to loyal diners who have followed chef Ponsaty to restaurants all over North County, including the now-defunct Tapenade, El Bizcocho, Bernard'O and La Bastide Bistro. A fifth-generation chef, Ponsaty is one of just two French Master Chefs in San Diego County.

Reached by phone last month, Ponsaty said his break with Grand Restaurant Group was related to cost-cutting measures on produce and staffing that were imposed in the spring by the company's new management.

Boyd Kerr, president and chief operating officer for Grand Restaurant Group, disputed Ponsaty's claim, saying its commitment to quality ingredients and local produce remains unchanged.

Besides Nick & G's, Grand Restaurant Group operates Bellamy's Restaurant and Verbena Catering Co., both in Escondido; the special-events venue The Ranch at Bandy Canyon in the San Pasqual Valley; and the seven-store DiCicco's Italian Restaurant chain, with locations in Fresno, Madera, Oakhurst and Kingsburg.

Ponsaty said he has been contacted by some restaurant owners around the county and is weighing his options for a return to the kitchen very soon.