NEWS

"Tangerine, tangerine / Living reflections from a dream"
TANGERINE LED ZEPPELIN

Pasta shop from Olmo Bagels co-founder opens on College Street

BY CHUER CINDY ZHONG
STAFF REPORTER



MARTIN PERALTA / HEAD PHOTOGRAPHER
This month, the team behind the popular bagel joint opened Twirl, which aims to bring fast and affordable Italian cuisine to locals and Yale students. The co-founder of both eateries said Twirl takes inspiration from the original concept for Olmo.

The team behind Olmo Bagels, the popular bagel shop on Whitney Avenue, is looking to shake up the New Haven food scene again by serving up fresh Italian pasta.

Twirl, which describes itself on its website as an "affordable fun pasta restaurant," began serving bowls at its 260 College St. storefront on Oct. 3. The restaurant will host a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Wednesday after "redefining roles" for its staff to accommodate for the demand they saw in the first days of opening, according to Craig Hutchinson, the co-founder of Olmo and Twirl. Visitors can choose their preferred variety of fresh pasta and sauce, then pick add-ins.

Hutchinson said the inspiration for Twirl came from Olmo's original concept when it first opened in 2018. The restaurant has always served bagels, but also offered pasta, sandwiches and salads in its early years.

"I wouldn't really call us a bagel spot back then, we were like a new American meets Italian restaurant," Hutchinson wrote in an email, referring to Olmo. "We were taking fine dining and we were dressing it down."

But during the COVID-19 pandemic, Hutchinson said, he had to cut down Olmo's menu and staff size. Even after the shop rebounded from the pandemic, he said, "there was always this part of me that was just super sad that we weren't cooking pasta."

Hutchinson said that he hopes Twirl can provide Yale students with a dining experience that would be cheaper than a dining hall meal swipe. He added that Twirl could also serve theatergoers looking for a quick meal before a show, since "it's hard to get out of" other New Haven restaurants "in under an hour and a half."

Hutchinson said the restaurant's opening process — from the acquisition of the property to its ribbon-cutting on Wednesday — took about three and a half months to complete, which was faster than the expected four-month schedule. He thanked the team at The Shops at Yale, which owns Twirl's storefront, for their help preparing for the opening.

As for Olmo, Hutchinson said, he's taking a step back.

"I know that it's important to evolve and constantly tweak a business," Hutchinson said. "But at the end of the day, tweaking it can be too much, and just letting it be its own gem is important."

He added that "giving the reins over to people with fresh ideas" has been "great."

Twirl has been in communication with several Yale student organizations about future collaborations, Hutchinson said.

Nicolas Gertler '27, a leader of the Yale Entrepreneurial Society, said the organization is currently in the preliminary stages of planning a partnership with Twirl. He said he was a frequent customer at Olmo before he heard about its founders opening the pasta restaurant.

"It is not only a place that offers great bagels," Gertler said, referring to Olmo, "but a place where people go in because there's a smile on everyone's face."

The collaboration, he said, will be focused on helping establish Twirl as a gathering place and a "staple in the New Haven food scene for folks to enjoy Italian cuisine."

Yale College Council Business Director Elizabeth Ovelil '29 wrote in a text message that the YCC has also been working with Twirl to plan a free student sampling night on Oct. 20. She wrote that the YCC had plans to reach out to other Yale student organizations, including the Yale College Chess Club, to incorporate games and other activities into the event.

Gertler said "almost every seat was taken" at Twirl when he visited Thursday night.

A standard bowl of pasta from Twirl costs $10.

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Guatemalan eatery moves into former refugee nonprofit cafe site

BY CHUER CINDY ZHONG
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La Cocina de Sandra, a Guatemalan-influenced restaurant, opened in the heart of Downtown New Haven on Sunday.

The restaurant's Temple Street storefront once housed Havenly Cafe, where the refugee nonprofit Havenly used to train refugee women. After federal grant cuts led Havenly to close its physical location in July, Sandra Trigueros, La Cocina de Sandra's founder and a graduate of Havenly's job-training program, asked Havenly's co-director, Caterina Passoni, about the space.

Trigueros's son, Elmer E. Galvez Jr., said Havenly encouraged Trigueros to start her own business in August 2021. According to Galvez, the operation began as a ghost kitchen, catering food and using Havenly's kitchen when the cafe wasn't open. Later, the business also operated a food truck.

Galvez said the La Cocina de Sandra will be "a space for immigrants and refugees, just like Havenly was."

Galvez said it felt important to open the restaurant in light of the Trump administration's aggressive stance toward immigrants. The restaurant's debut is like a "middle finger to the administration," he said.

"We're still gonna open up anyways," he said. "You cannot intimidate us."

The Sunday event featured a ribbon-cutting ceremony, and attendees could try free noodles, drinks and Latin American dishes made fresh from the restaurant's kitchens.

Galvez said that opening the brick-and-mortar location "felt like a passing of the torch."

The restaurant has a plan for what to do in case Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents come, according to Galvez. In late August, ICE's Boston office carried out a four-day "targeted immigration enforcement operation" in southern Connecticut, arresting 118 people. Last month, the agency arrested at least two people at Tweed New Haven Airport.

The restaurant's grand opening was attended by former Ward 9 Alder Caroline Tanbee Smith '14 SOM '25 and Havenly members. Several other New Haven residents and Yale students also gathered to celebrate the new restaurant.

One New Havener, Ena Fisher, said she was excited to try the restaurant's food because she is "from the Carribean, and their food is not too different from mine."

Katherine Escalante ENV '27 and Christian Deras said they first found out about La Cocina de Sandra's opening from social media. After learning about the restaurant's Guatemalan influence, Escalante said they knew they had to go because "there's a true deficit of Central American spots in New Haven."

"A lot of the dishes that they're serving are kind of a fusion of Central American cuisines," Escalante said.

She said the restaurant's pupusas, a flatbread stuffed with savory fillings, and empanadas were "like the delicacy in my household, so it's so fun seeing it and having it closer to home."

Deras added that he liked the opening's warm atmosphere, which "feels very nice, very wholesome, like going to a family party."

Escalante said she worked in the U.S. Senate this past summer, where struggling small businesses, especially Hispanic-owned ones, were "a really big conversation."

"It's a hard time economically for a lot of our community," Escalante said. "I feel a lot of emotions when I see something like this because I think it's a really important symbol of resistance in a time where it can be really easy to surrender to fear."

La Cocina de Sandra is open every day of the week from 12 p.m. to 8 p.m.



CHUER CINDY ZHONG / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
Sandra Trigueros started La Cocina de Sandra as a ghost kitchen in 2021 after encouragement from refugee nonprofit Havenly. Now, her business has moved into the nonprofit's former storefront after federal grant cuts led Heavenly to move out.

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