

OUR 2014 ANNUAL REPORT & WINTER APPEAL with EXCITING NEWS

This past October 31, 2014, we celebrated five years in our little café On the Square in Woodstock. It has been an amazing five years!

And I can't forget two wonderful years in the Woodstock Farmers Market, making it seven years since I first brought my foods to town. It was in the Market that I was warmly welcomed by so many of you and started my love affair with Woodstock. The spot that became the café was right across the street from where I parked my trailer (correction: Keith Johnson, director of the Market, parked my trailer for me since I never could back it into place).

During those seven years, Expressly Leslie moved into a permanent Woodstock location, the first fully vegetarian restaurant in the area and the first with that Middle Eastern flavor we all love.

I have met and become friends with so many of you...and many of you are on my email list or FaceBook page, so I get to chat with you every week! You have been right there each step of the way as we tried things, many that worked (and one or two that didn't). You were there when we won grant money and were able to get needed refrigeration. You were there for our growth! You have all been so generous with your support, and I think we have responded by welcoming you warmly and serving you delicious food.

This year you voted us Best of the Fox (Best Vegetarian Dining in McHenry County). We have a five-star rating in YELP and so many wonderful comments there and on other sites. We were thrilled with your recognition, and we want to thank you, our friends and customers, for all your support.

Originally I had in mind a little place that I could run myself – just cooking away and serving up food. Well, I got the “little place” part, but it was never something I could run myself and has become less so as we've grown. Thank goodness, I've had wonderful staff working with me over the years, and each has made a contribution to our further growth. This year I'd like to especially thank Laura, who has been doing such an amazing job managing us all and who is such a creative (and good) cook!

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And now for THE NEWS: As we have grown, it has become increasingly challenging for me to keep up with all the details of the business. Many are the times I have wished for a person to be involved with Expressly Leslie who knows how to develop it as a business. Finally we have such a person, and I am very excited about our future.

Beginning February 1, Barry Coleman of Coleman's Bar & Grill, will work with us at Expressly Leslie to turn it into the kind of business it can and should be! I'd like to tell you a little about this exciting development and what you can expect to see:

- First and foremost, you can expect to see familiar faces, including Laura and me. We will continue to work hard to bring you delicious food each and every day. I suspect you will also see Barry. We're delighted to welcome him and hope you will give him a warm welcome as well.
- In addition to familiar faces and at least one new one, you can also expect to see the foods you have come to know and love.
- Hooray! You will soon see those extended hours that so many of you have asked about.
- Along with extended hours, you can anticipate extended options for food with our daily soups and specials and more.
- Perhaps we can look forward to changes in the contours of our space or how we use our space.

This transition is a work in progress, but I am very excited about the future of Expressly Leslie Vegetarian Specialties on the square and look forward to seeing how it all develops. I hope you will be with us for that journey.

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Finally, I'd like to take a moment to ask for your support again this winter. Winters are always difficult On the Square, and this year with such an important transition occurring, is especially difficult. Three years ago, as I watched other restaurants and businesses close all around me and worried about our own future, I sent you an email and explained what we needed during these winter months to continue to open the doors.

What we need is a very simple equation: an average 65 people walking through the door each and every day that we are open. During the summer months, we achieve that. During the winter we struggle, and so at this time each year, I ask for your support during these next four months.

Each day that we welcome 65 of you into the Café, we will award an Expressly Leslie Gift Certificate to one person who came in that day. We'll set out a container and little slips of paper where you can leave your contact information. At the end of any day that we reach our goal, we'll draw a name and contact you with your Gift.

Here are ten ways you can support us during the winter:

- **Be one of the 65!**
- On the run, or did you miss a favorite salad on the day we offered it? Get something from the **Chik Chak Chow 'Fridge** with all the beautiful soups and salads on display.
- Give the gift that keeps on giving – an **Expressly Leslie Gift Certificate**.

- Having a party at home or in the office or a cozy dinner for two? Call us! **We cater!**
- Help us make **Friday evenings** THE PLACE TO BE. We always have great music from the Off Square Music group. We are so proud to host these wonderful musicians from 5:30 – 7:30 PM each week, and we're **BYOB!**
- When you think "**lunch**," think of a bowl of one of our delicious soups – and then come get it! Veggie Bowls also make a great, complete Meal in a Bowl.
- Check out our **daily specials**, listed in our twice weekly emails – you can always reserve yours in advance if you can't get in until the end of the day.
- Take advantage of the **extended hours** we already have (we're open 'til 7:30 PM on Thursdays and Fridays)
- The Market isn't across on the Square on **Tuesdays and Saturdays** during the winter months, but we are, and we would love to see you!
- **Tell someone about us** this week, or better yet, bring them in with you to try us! Be sure you get them to sign onto our **email list** so they'll know what's cooking.

Thank you for everything, Woodstock, and I look forward to seeing all of you in this exciting New Year. I hope you are all enjoying a joy-filled, healthy holiday season.