Angie’s 30th birthday: Plenty of work, commitment to helping | Journalism

10/26/2013

October 26, 2013

October 26th, 2013 Posted in Business, Food

‘I had no money. We had an old, beat-up car. We tried like crazy and finally one of the banks gave us a $10,000 loan. We opened the restaurant with a $10,000 loan.’ — Saboor Sahely, owner of Angie’s

By Mitch Henline

LOGAN — On Oct. 21, 1983, Saboor Sahely opened the doors to his new restaurant on Main Street in Logan. Thirty years later, Angie’s restaurant is moving along as strong as ever and has become known as the place “where the locals eat.” To mark the occasion of its 30th birthday, Angie’s offered special discounts to customers — coffee for 83 cents a cup and breakfast for $3.30, for example.

Throughout the 30 years Angie’s has been around it has had its difficulties, but Sahely has been able to use it as a tool to help others. Sahely moved from Afghanistan to Logan in the mid-1970s to attend Utah State University, where he met his wife. While going to school, he worked the graveyard shift for a restaurant chain known as Sambo’s, located in the same place that Angie’s is now.

“I washed dishes for them and then I became a cook,” he said. “Then I became an assistant manager. ”

After graduating with his degree in business in 1980, Sahely said he swore to himself that he wouldn’t ever work in the restaurant business again, but after submitting applications for employment and not finding a job, he decided to accept the position of store manager for Sambo’s. In 1981, he moved up in the company and become the district manager for all the Sambo’s stores in the Pacific Northwest. “That was a huge opportunity and responsibility,” Sahely said. “That basically cemented the idea that this is what I should probably be doing for the rest of my life.”

Two years later in 1983, Sambo’s went bankrupt. Sahely was ready to move to Denver to accept another position with Arby’s. He was visiting with his sister-in-law in Oregon when the idea for the restaurant was conceived. She suggested Sahely buy the Sambo’s building in Logan, start a restaurant and name it after his 2-year-old daughter Angie.

“I had no money. We had an old, beat-up car,” he said. “We tried like crazy and finally one of the banks gave us a $10,000 loan. We opened the restaurant with a $10,000 loan.”

Sahely said there were enormous struggles, especially at the beginning, but that failure wasn’t an option. In order to sustain the company, Sahely and his wife would both work long hours, seven days a week. Sahely ran the store and his wife would wait table. The money she made from tips would be saved to purchase the family’s groceries.

“For the first couple of years, we lived in a basement apartment. We did not even have a bed. We slept on a mattress,” he said. “We’d come to work at 5 in the morning and come home at 10 o’ clock at night. We did not get a day off the first year of the business.”

Sahely said the restaurant was not profitable for the first two or three years. “When you work literally 70-80 hours a week and at the end of the year you find out you made $5,000, it can be discouraging,” he said. “You have to hang in there.”

Despite the early struggles, Angie’s has been able to double in capacity and increase its staff from 15 to 80, with 40–45 of those being full-time employees. Sahely said it has been rewarding to have his children work alongside him in the restaurant while they were growing up and to also employ other USU students while they went to school. “Hundreds and hundreds of students from Utah State have graduated through the years,” he said. “They work here for three or four years. They get their education. They get their degrees and they become very successful people.”

Bri Spring has been working at Angie’s for 20 years. He said that it is Sahely and the customers that have kept him there. “I meet a lot of good people,” he said. “Saboor is an amazing man. You couldn’t work for a better person than Saboor.”

One of the annual events that Angie’s holds is a community Thanksgiving dinner. Every year on Thanksgiving, Angie’s provides a free dinner for whoever shows up. The meal is free, but those who show up have the option of donating to a local charity. The dinner is
normally attended by about 800 people who help to raise thousands of dollars. The inspiration for the dinner came years earlier while Sahely was still in school, working the graveyard shift at Sambo’s. The janitor would come in to clean at 2 a.m. while Sahely was washing dishes.

“He invited me over to his house for Thanksgiving dinner,” Sahely said. “I had no clue what Thanksgiving was. He took me home and fed me this huge dinner. It was turkey, pumpkin pie – the whole routine. He told me what Thanksgiving was all about. He was the first person in America to educate me on Thanksgiving.”

As for the future of Angie’s, Sahely said he is going to continue to take care of customers and serve pancakes. “We’re still at it,” he said. “We don’t know what the future will bring. We’re just going to continue doing what we are doing.

“This restaurant is providing me with an opportunity to make a living, along with 80 other people to make a living,” he said. “All credit goes to God. God put us in the position to help ourselves and help other people.”