

Angelo Liollo owns Jim's Place with his brothers-in-law Dimitri and Costa Taras. Together they share Greek food and heritage with diners in West Tennessee.

# Palate-Pleasing Jim's Place

The Taras family continues a Memphis-area dining tradition at their Jim's Place East and Jim's Place Grille restaurants. By James T. Black



**W**alking through the tree-shaded entrance and pulling open the front door, it's easy to mistake the restaurant for a private home. That's understandable. For years the rambling building that houses Jim's Place East served as a getaway for the Taras family, a place to escape the bustle of their busy downtown restaurant.

"Our uncle, Nick, and his partner, Jim Katsouthes, started the original Jim's Place near The Peabody Memphis in 1921. Our father, Bill, joined them a few years later," says Costa Taras. "It was open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We didn't even have a key to lock the front door."

Jim's Place served as a Memphis mainstay for more than 50 years, until a developer bought the property in the 1970s. "We had a weekend home about 15 miles from downtown," Costa adds. "So we moved the restaurant out there and renamed it Jim's Place East."

## Flavorful Family Tradition

Costa and his brother Dimitri grew up working in the original Jim's Place and later in its eastern reincarnation. Now, joined by their brother-in-law Angelo Liollo, they continue the family's 87-year tradition of bringing tastes of Greece to Memphis.

"We still use some of the same recipes that our uncle and father brought when they came to this country as teenagers," Costa says. "They grew up making Greek specialties, such as Souflima [grilled pieces of pork tenderloin]. Our mother, Bessie, made most of the baklava until a few years ago."

Those Taras traditions join dishes such as marinated bay scallops and moussaka (roasted eggplant layered with spiced ground beef) to help the restaurant earn acclaim from diners and food critics across Tennessee. In addition to the recipes, Costa, Dimitri, and Angelo also inherited another restaurant-running tip from their relatives: the importance of hands-on management. **➔ turn to page 10**



Dimitri Taras serves up a sandwich at Jim's Place Grille, a neighborhood eatery the Taras family opened two years ago in Collierville.

### It's Greek to Them

The Taras and Liollo families serve up a bit of their heritage during annual field trips for elementary school students to Jim's Place East. "We think it's important to share our history with the next generation," Angelo says. "They need to learn how Greek culture has influenced the whole world." During the tasty trips, youngsters watch demonstrations of Greek cooking, sample native foods, and join in as a troupe from a local church performs traditional dances. "It's one of our favorite field trips," says Peggy Davidson, a Riverdale Elementary School teacher who organizes the event. "Now at the beginning of the year students and parents start asking, 'When are we going to Jim's Place East?'"

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COSTA TARAS, CO-OWNER OF JIM'S PLACE



### A Place East of Jim's

Dimitri took that advice, as well as a few authentic Greek recipes, moving farther east to run the family's newly opened Jim's Place Grille in Collierville. The restaurant is also managed by Dimitri's sons, James and Sam, who got their start at Jim's Place East.

Together, the three turned a cozy restaurant a few miles east of Jim's Place East into a popular gathering spot. "This is a little more informal than the other restaurant," Dimitri adds. "Most of our customers live only a mile or two away, so everybody seems to know everybody."

Lunch at the Grille finds a Collierville crowd digging into sandwiches such as the vegetable-packed Greek Island Club or the eggplant-enhanced Grecian Lamb Burger. Dinner entrées include steaks, kabobs, and seafood dishes such as Dimitri's Charcoal Shrimp.

"We get a lot of families," Dimitri

says. "I like that because some of my best memories are of my family working and eating together." Along with his brother, brother-in-law, nephew Bill, and sons, the veteran restaurateur hopes to help new generations of Memphis families create similar memories.

"This town used to be full of family-run restaurants, but now there are only a few left," he adds. "I think the two longest continuously run places are probably ours and the Vergos' Rendezvous Ribs downtown. They're our cousins, so I guess you could say we're all one big family." ●

Jim's Place East, 5560 Shelby Oaks Drive, is located off of I-40 at the White Station Road exit. The restaurant is open for lunch Tuesday-Friday and for dinner Tuesday-Saturday. Visit [www.jimsplaceeast.com](http://www.jimsplaceeast.com), or call (901) 388-7200. Jim's Place Grille, 3660 South Houston Levee, Suite 112, in Collierville, is open Monday-Friday for lunch and dinner and Saturday for dinner only. Visit [www.jimsplacegrille.com](http://www.jimsplacegrille.com), or call (901) 861-5000.