

FAMILY-RUN PANCAKE HOUSE OPENS

Richard Walker Jr. brings father's concept to Carlsbad

BY PAM KRAGEN

CARLSBAD

When it comes to American comfort food and hospitality, Richard Walker Jr. says serving it up fast and piping hot is in his blood.

Walker is a third-generation restaurateur and the owner of the Richard Walker's Pancake House that opened Monday in the new Square at Bressi Ranch shopping center in Carlsbad.

Walker's father, Richard Sr., started the gourmet pancake chain in Schaumburg, Ill., in 1989, and brought the concept west with him when he moved to San Diego in 2006.

Richard Sr. opened the first local Richard Walker's Pancake House that year in the Gaslamp Quarter. Richard Jr. is the owner of the La Jolla location, which opened in 2014, and the new Carlsbad location.

Richard Walker's Pancake House is most famous for its apple pancake, a mountainous oven-baked cake filled with fresh-sliced Granny Smith apples and cinnamon glaze. It's also known for its oven-baked omelettes and its German pancake, a large bowl-shaped, souffle-like baked cake served with lemon syrup.

Walker said all of the more than 70 items on the menu are prepared fresh daily in-house. Produce is sourced locally and there's no walk-in freezer, deep-fat fryer or commercial can-opener. The company also sources its coffee beans directly from farmers in Central America.

"We were farm to table before there was such a thing," Walker said.

The menu features 20 varieties of pancakes, 22 egg dishes, eight kinds of waffles and seven styles of crepes. There's also a small lunch menu of sandwiches and salads and a children's menu. Most dishes range in price from \$10.95 to \$15.95.

While egg and thick-cut



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Richard Walker Jr. inside his newly opened restaurant, Richard Walker's Pancake House, in the Square at Bressi Ranch shopping center in Carlsbad.

bacon dishes are the restaurant's top-sellers, the No. 2 item is the apple pancake, which is cooked to order in 10 to 20 minutes. The dish is prepared so frequently that customers can always smell the apples baking when they arrive.

The Walker family got into the food business in 1948, when brothers Victor and Everett Walker began opening snack shops in Evanston, Ill. When Harland Sanders began franchising his Kentucky Fried Chicken concept in the 1950s, Victor Walker jumped in early, eventually owning 19 KFC franchises. But the round-the-clock fast-food business was hard on family life, so he bought into another fast-growing chain, Portland-based The Original Pancake House, which also debuted in the 1950s.

In 1981, Victor's sons Ray and Richard Sr. launched their own pancake concept, Walker Bros. Original Pancake House in Glenview, Ill. And eight years later, Richard Sr. went solo with his own eponymous restaurant brand. Today, there are two Richard Walker's locations in Illinois and three in San Diego County.

Richard Sr., 65, lives in an apartment just 18 steps from his downtown location at 520 Front St. His son, Richard Jr., said that's typical of the

Richard Walker's Pancake House

Hours: 6:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. daily

Where: The Square at Bressi Ranch (behind BevMo), 2656 Gateway Road, Carlsbad

Phone: (760) 893-8400

Online: richardwalkers.com

family's hands-on approach to hospitality.

"Food was deep in my grandfather's blood and making that human connection with customers is something that our family has been doing for generations," Richard Jr. said.

While father and son both live downtown and they share the family restaurant concept, they operate their businesses separately to ensure family harmony.

Richard Jr. — who was the enthusiastic social chair for his college fraternity — said there was never any question about following in his family's culinary footsteps, but he would have to raise the money on his own.

"Arranging teams, motivating crews and solving problems really excites me. I feed on stress," he said. "And

I have a passion for the way food is presented and unique."

After graduating from the University of Iowa, Walker spent nearly a dozen years as a program management adviser for Ernst & Young, serving clients in 60 countries and 49 U.S. states.

Once he'd saved enough, he quit his job and opened the La Jolla location in 2014. All of his profits from that have been funneled into his new 1,700-square-foot Carlsbad location, which was built in just 14 weeks by CLTVT Construction.

On Wednesday, work crews were still installing space heaters on the restaurant's 700-square-foot front patio, but that didn't deter the many customers who had come in to check out the new location.

Like his father, Walker Jr. spends all of his time inside his two restaurants, greeting customers and overseeing operations. He also eats there every day: vegan egg whites with spinach and ham but no cheese. He's especially proud of how the San Diego County restaurants have adapted to the tastes of local diners, like the recently introduced avocado toast flight.

"I couldn't be more delighted," he said.

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