

Grounded grows in downtown popularity

Centretown coffee shop has grown 'from the ground up'

By Louise Rachlis

When Amir Rahim runs or walks from his home at Metcalfe and Lisgar to his restaurant at 100 Gloucester St. near O'Connor Street, he's well aware of the joys of living and working in Centretown.

All week long, at noon hour Grounded Kitchen & Coffeehouse is packed with neighbourhood office worker dine-in-ers while a line of dine-out-ers snakes up to pick up their meals to go.

Some sit alone in the comfortable location, with their pocket novels or newspapers; others chat in small and large groups.

The restaurant is also busy for breakfast from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m., and dinner from 4:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

"I've been in restaurants my whole life," says Rahim. "Everything I've done has led to this."

He came from Toronto with his family when he was seven, and has "seen Ottawa grow from a quiet town. I love Ottawa."

Both his parents began running a Swiss Chalet restaurant in 1979, and he and his sister "grew



Amir Rahim, co-owner of Grounded Kitchen & Coffeehouse, sits at a table constructed from a hot tub in his Centretown restaurant.

"there."

Now his own daughter Nazlin, six, has the same opportunity to grow up in a restaurant just as her father did. She even has her own menu of "roast beef, cucumber and Swiss cheese" which she has named "the Nazlin Special" and sells for a dollar.

"I get real pride when she says 'let's go to Daddy's café,'" says her father.

He is also grateful for the help of Andrea, his life partner. "I wouldn't be here without her. She has been by my side since the decision to do this. She gets free ba-

gels and cream cheese - her favourite - for life."

And he says he couldn't have done it either without his business partner and friend Gabriel Pollock, who is the restaurant's co-owner and chef.

In the summer of 2010, their "lifelong dream" to open a restaurant with quality food and all natural ingredients came to fruition.

"I was looking for a business for a year and a half," says Rahim. "When this location became available, I decided to make a go of it. I'm super grateful it has

turned out as I planned."

Just like the meals that are created completely from scratch, he is proud that his furnishings are "built from the ground up" too.

The open-kitchen at Grounded serves from behind two wooden carts, former Museum of Civilization exhibition items they picked up from Cohen & Cohen Re-use Store. The bar is built out of whiskey barrels, and there's a glass table made from an old door.

After deciding on their location in the former Hair Junkie Salon, Rahim and Pollock enlisted

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- Amir Rahim
Co-owner,
Grounded Kitchen
& Coffeehouse

the help of friends to build the coffee bar, scrape the ceiling and paint the walls.

Rahim and Pollock decided on the concept of an outdoor market, indoors, and the menu and their business evolved from there. "I've seen a lot of restaurants and I'm confident in what we're doing. Customers can use real plates and cutlery, but not spend a fortune."

Most of their customers walk in from within a five block radius, but some come "all the way from Kent Street." "The response was all from word of mouth. We had to show up and be all we could be, and the word travelled."

He has learned that "real estate is key" and would like eventually to have multiple locations. "There are a lot of condos going up and it's not as risky to set up in a less 'congregated' location," he says. "Ottawa is becoming more of an urban city. It's not Montreal or Toronto, but it's getting there."

View www.groundedkitchen-coffee.com.

The height of fear: Walking on the edge of the CN Tower

By Tracy Gagnon

Look up. Look way up. Now focus. A little harder. And squint. Can you see them? One, two, three, four, five. Five teeny dots.

That's us. Five intrepid individuals with our butts hanging off the edge of the CN Tower, taking in an attraction called EdgeWalk.

A little closer and you'll see we're all smiles. Look closer still and you'll notice the smiles are really grimaces frozen in place. Five grimacing individuals stupid with fear.

Five total strangers bonded as we geared up and sped to the top of the CN Tower in the glass elevator.

The attraction is completely safe. We learn that the trolley and harness system was tested endlessly and the ropes are strong enough to drop a bus off the edge without breaking the rope. That's a relief. At least in our minds.

The body, on the other hand, simply did not believe. Our first assignment was "Toes over Toronto." I look down through the grating to the streets of Toronto, 356 meters below my feet. Then I look up and scrutinize the metal tubing over my head, over 16,000 kilograms of steel. I know I'm safe.

Baby steps forward. I will myself over the five-foot platform that extends around the circumference of the observation deck's roof. Then I back track. I try over and over but I simply cannot make myself go to the edge.

Others try. Robert, a 17-year-old Torontonion, pecks his way over. Amanda, here for her 18th birthday, places a toe over Toronto. Ronnie, another local boy, after some cajoling finds his toes over Toronto. Only Maya, another birthday girl, breezes to the edge.

Our guide Daffy congratulates us, in-



Tracy Gagnon lets it all hang out 356 metres above the streets of Toronto while participating in EdgeWalk at the CN Tower.

forming the group that the first time she tried to stand at the edge, she couldn't keep her legs from shaking. She can relate to our intense feelings. She says, "Be proud of your accomplishment. And by the way, wave to the camera. You're being watched live by everyone on the observation deck."

On to our next challenge: leaning back over the edge, stretching out our legs and letting go of the rope. I have no problem with this. As a rock climber, I've always loved the feeling of sitting into my harness after a hard climb and rappelling back down a rock face. I close my eyes, stretch out my arms and feel the wind sweep over my body. This is incredible.

Again, each member of the group has different degrees of success. By now, Maya has found her rhythm and she is fearless. Robert soon follows. They hang off the tower chatting nonchalantly.

We are about half way around the tow-

er now, walking as close to the edge as possible. Daffy sets up the next event. She tells us one of her favourite movie scenes is from Titanic where Jack escorts Rose to the very front of the ship. They lean out over the ocean, arms spread breathlessly.

Daffy demonstrates, expertly pressing the rope in front of her, walking to the edge, and then leaning on the rope. She opens her arms and stands on her toes.

Now it's my turn. I'm not sure I can do it. Baby steps again. "Just a little further," directs Daffy. "That's it. Now put the rope in front of you." I do as she tells me and feel the safety of the rope. I have finally found my rhythm. I lean out, spread my arms fully and yell, "I'm queen of the world!" What a moment! I am beyond thrilled.

Why people would pay to do something like this, especially if it frightens them? I asked each of my cohorts, who had

very different answers. Maya and Amanda had milestone birthdays they wanted to celebrate in a unique way. Robert thought it would be a cool story to go back to school with. It was sort of a guy thing for Ronnie.

For me? I started rock climbing to overcome my fear of heights and although it really helps, every once in a while I try to push my limits by taking on a new challenge, like bungee jumping, hot air ballooning and now EdgeWalk.

What I've learned from climbing is that I not only challenge my fears, but I get to see things that few other people get to see. It gives me a new perspective on the world. It expands my horizons. And what a beautiful horizon from the top of the CN Tower!

But I have a secret. I also did EdgeWalk to beat out my husband, Pierre, on being higher up the CN Tower than he has been.

In 2002, Pierre was part of the high angle team who replaced the Tower's Radome (the donut-shaped, fibreglass fabric which protects the Tower's microwave equipment at the base of the SkyPod). But I was 10 metres higher on EdgeWalk! Guess who's doing EdgeWalk next year?

Tracy Gagnon is a health and wellness writer. See her blog called *Along the Fitness Trail* <http://tracyfitflog.wordpress.com/>

EdgeWalk details

What: EdgeWalk opened in August 2011 and will remain open into October. Re-opens in May 2012.

Price: \$175 + tax, which includes: 1.5 hour experience (half an hour outside), two photos, a CD of the experience, free admittance to Look Out, Glass Floor, SkyPod, the Ultimate Wave Tahiti 3D movie, and the Motion Theatre Ride.

Reservations: 1-416-601-3833

Information: www.edgewalktower.ca

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