

# News

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### Restaurateur tries to fill void left by La Shish

By CAROL HOPKINS  
Of The Oakland Press

Fadhel Gannouni had a man show up at his Farmington Hills restaurant Tuesday asking for a job.

"He said if he couldn't be paid, he would work just for food," said Gannouni, who owns two La Marsa restaurants in Oakland County.

Gannouni learned the man - 31-year-old Salim Al-Halmi, a Hamtramck resident with a wife and two young children originally from Yemen - had been a kitchen worker at the La Shish restaurant in Farmington Hills for five years. This past Saturday, La Shish closed its 11 metro Detroit restaurants, including three in Oakland County, putting Al-Halmi and hundreds of other employees out of work.

After checking that Al-Halmi had his immigration papers in order, Gannouni hired him.

"He looks at me now and there are tears in his eyes," after the closing of the popular Middle Eastern restaurants. The repercussions are still being felt around the region said Gannouni, who owns his restaurants with partner Adel Ahmed. "He's a good worker."

Gannouni has decided to honor any of La Shish's gift certificates that may be tucked away in someone's wallet or purse.

"I had an 82-year-old woman come in a few days ago with a La Shish gift certificate she had received from her son," said Gannouni, who was born in the northern African country of Tunisia.

The 110-seat Bloomfield Hills La Marsa restaurant has been open since January in the space formerly occupied by Lebanese Garden.

The restaurants offer raw juices, salads and traditional fare such as lamb, moussaka, shish tawook, hummus, fried kibbee, falafel and shish kabobs. Diners seated in the intimate dining area can watch workers bake bread in an oven at the back of the restaurant.

Farnhan El Nagu, general manager of the Bloomfield Hills location, said he had a packed room for lunch Wednesday.

"We feel bad for the (employee) families, but it's been good for us," El Nagu said.

Gannouni, who lives in Southfield, has no plans to buy empty La Shish restaurants.

"No, we will build the buildings ourselves," he said, adding he wanted no association with the trouble

connected with La Shish.

Gannouni would have plenty to tell the now-fugitive La Shish owners, if he had the chance. "I'd say this country built you. You came here with nothing and this country give us everything," he said.

Oakland County had La Shish restaurants in Auburn Hills, Troy and Farmington Hills.

He is more interested in spreading the word about his restaurants.

Gannouni said, "Any people who were used to going to La Shish, tell them La Marsa is here for them."