

# Upscale diner in Orange grabs customers

By Pamela McLoughlin  
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**ORANGE** — James Doukas comes from a traditional Greek diner background.

But he also has a keen eye for trends and experience in running his own upscale restaurant.

So Doukas combined the best of those worlds and created the Equinox Diner at 285 Boston Post Road, where customers can get eggs and pancakes any time of day, but can also get a dinner of Ahi tuna with champagne wasabi cream sauce.

"This generation is very educated when it comes to culinary cuisine," Doukas said. "No disrespect to fellow opera-

tors, but over the years diners have slipped in their attention to detail and quality ... I believe it's all about the customer."

Equinox isn't open 24 hours a day, but it is open seven days a week for long hours, catching both the early breakfast crowd and the nightclub set.

The kitchen is led by chef Donald Whitney, who was trained at Johnson & Wales Culinary School.

Then there are the 52-inch plasma televisions.

Doukas, who lives in Westchester, N.Y., with his wife, Francine, and their three children, opened the 175-seat diner in April. In a few weeks, he will open a 300-seat Equinox Diner in Mystic.

Doukas says business at the Orange diner is booming, despite the ailing economy, because he offers an upscale product at diner prices, hoping to make up in return customers what he loses in per-plate markups.

Doukas said he fell in love with Orange when he first looked at the spot where the Red River Grill sat, even though he practically rebuilt the structure.

He said the presence of so many restaurants nearby doesn't trouble him a bit.

"I like competition because I like to show my customers I can do better than the next guy," he said.

Customer Raymond Ragaini

of Ansonia eats at Equinox frequently at various times of day. He raves about everything, from the way customers are valued to the ease in asking for special items like extra salad dressing.

"It's a better feeling than a normal diner — I'd call it a diner plus," Ragaini said during a late lunch at Equinox.

Doukas does a lot of traveling these days between Westchester, Orange and Mystic, and he's no stranger to the laborious 17-hour work day the restaurant business often demands.

His dad, George Doukas, first opened a diner in 1969

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