

Vintage Giordano Diner makes journey from Lawrence to new home in Hamilton



The Giordano Diner was hauled along Route 1 this morning to its new home on North Johnston Avenue in Hamilton. *(Michael Mancuso/The Times of Trenton)*

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When Nate Buckingham of Wolfe House & Building Movers accelerated onto Route 1 at 10:05 a.m. today, the famed Giordano Diner was along for the ride as he and his crew made their journey to the eatery's new home in neighboring Hamilton.

With an escort of four New Jersey State Police vehicles leading the way, the historic diner rolled away from the corner of Bakers Basin Road onto Interstate 295, Route 33 and then past neighborhoods in Hamilton along Nottingham Way, making its final stop at the place it'll be reincarnated on North Johnston Avenue.

When the diner arrived, it was met with a familiar face — Marcia Minunni of Hamilton, whose grandfather, Cass Giordano of Lawrence, owned and operated the diner in the 1950s. Minunni spent her childhood behind the scenes at the diner, the place where she "met so many wonderful people," she said.

"This is the best ending. It's the best beginning. It doesn't get any better than this. It really doesn't," Minunni said. "I met my first milkshake here. Boring vanilla."

Daniel Popkin, head of Hamilton-based Modern Recycled Spaces, and the Trenton-based Isles community service organization are teaming up to incorporate the diner into a project to turn a 300,000-square-foot factory building into space for artists and nonprofit organizations. The diner will be refurbished as a classroom space for vocational training.

Today was the first time Minunni met Popkin and Isles CEO Martin Johnson as she hugged them tightly, tears trickling down her cheeks as she offered her appreciation for repurposing the diner and sparing it the wrecking ball.

"It's wonderful to have the personal connect with many years of family memories in this place. To see the depth of feeling about the place is really important," Johnson said as he gazed at the diner at the new site. "We feel really good about saving it from the landfill."

Isles launched a **fundraising website (www.crowdrise.com/savethediner)**, seeking \$50,000 in donations to restore the diner. The actual cost of restoration will be about \$100,000, director David Schrayner said.

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