

Mike Hatzistamoulos, Best Steak House

Interviewed by Laurie Stern at Best Steak House, St. Paul, June 28, 2012

Q So tell me what goes on here. What kind of business is this?

A This is the Best Steak House. It's a restaurant. We sell gyros, we've got fish, we've got chicken, we have everything. It's one of the best and the most popular restaurants on University Avenue.

Q So you've been here how long and why did you come here in the first place?

A We've been here for 25 years. The reason that we came here – we were just driving down University, we saw the building for sale, and we decided hey – let's buy this building and open up a steak house. So that's how we did it.

Q But I thought there were lots of Best Steak Houses.

A Not like this one. This is Extra Best Steak House.

Q OK. So to fast-forward 25 years now you've got the light rail. How has that affected your business?

A The light rail, the construction out there is not very nice. It's very, very tough on us. But hopefully we've only got like 50 more percent left to go. So we'll be ok. I ain't going nowhere. We'll be here.

Q How has who comes in for steak changed over the years?

A People...we get all kinds of people, you know – everywhere, from everywhere. We've got black customers, Mexicans, Orientals, whites. We get all kinds of people and we get lots of them from all kinds of nations.

Q And what's your story? Where are you from?

A I am Greek.

Q And what brought you to this country?

A My Mother and my Father.

Q And how old were you?

A Eleven.

Q And why St. Paul?

A Why St. Paul? That's where my family was – my Grandma, my Grandfather, aunts, uncles. But I do love St. Paul, though. I consider St. Paul as my home now.

Q Can you tell me the best thing about University Avenue?

A The best thing about University Avenue? The people. Everywhere you are going, you will not find people like University Avenue – good people, loving people and caring people. And I don't care what other people say.

Q What's the worst thing about University Avenue?

A The construction right now. And that's it.

Q Is it getting better because it's moving east?

A Well, it is getting better. Now they opened up this side, but they closed the other side. So it ain't no different, you know?

Q Are you a father?

A Am I a father? Yes, I am. I'm a grandfather, too.

Q Congratulations. Are you bringing the kids up to work at the restaurant?

A Yes I do. I have my daughter working here and I bring my grandson down here, who's seven years old, sometimes. He wants to start washing dishes pretty soon.

Q So this is your future, this is your inheritance....

A This is it, this is it. This is everything for me. This is the best thing for me.

Q And the children will carry it on, do you think?

A I sure hope so. I sure hope so. I would love to see that happen. I would love to see the kids take over and me come down here an old man with my cane and watch them work.

Q OK. I would like to see that too. Anything else you want to say?

A That's it.