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Capitol Hill Parts Ways with Two of Its Long Standing Cafés

Ashley Hagar and Kali Herbst Minino

Just over a month apart from each other, two beloved local Capitol Hill cafés announced their closings. Café Presse, located just off Seattle University's campus, took to Instagram Dec. 18 to share the news. After 15 years of business, owners Jim Drohman and Joanne Herron have decided to move into retirement and close Café Presse. Café Pettiroso found its home on 11th Avenue and Pike for 27 years before they announced their closure via an Instagram post Jan. 23.

Second-year Biology student Tiana Ganiko learned of Café Pettiroso her freshman year. Due to COVID-19, classes were online and opportunities to see other people in person were limited. Ganiko and her friends fell in love with Café Pettiroso and the food they served. She was shocked when she learned of the closure.

"We definitely weren't expecting it to close at all," Ganiko said. "We just couldn't believe it. At least to our knowledge, it seemed like they were pretty busy whenever we went on the weekends."

Both cafés drew members of the Seattle U community as they provided space for social gatherings and celebrations, even throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. However, both cited COVID-19 as part of their reasoning for closure.

Drohman and Herron explained that the pandemic was not the sole reason for closing, but definitely sped the process along.

"COVID-19 took the breath out of us all, but it is with your support that we were able to build back to a place that affords us a graceful exit. We are so grateful. Our departure would have looked differently if not for the pandemic, but nonetheless our plans to move forward were always based on something close to this timeline," Drohman and Herron stated on their Instagram closure announcement.

While Café Presse and Café Pettiroso will be missed among current students, faculty and staff, both have created memories for numerous people who have come through the Seattle U campus. Ganiko touched on how long these restaurants have been in business, comparing herself to other generations of customers.

"It's just so disappointing. That restaurant has been around for over 20 years, I just can't imagine what it must be like for adults or older friend groups who have been going there for years," Ganiko said.

For Paulette Kidder, associate professor in the philosophy department, Café Presse was practically part of Seattle U.



Adeline Ong

“My consistent memories are going there, and whenever you’d go there, there would be Seattle U people. There would be other people from the community, a colleague, a student, who was also having lunch there. It felt like an extension of campus,” Kidder said.

History Professor Emeritus David Madsen echoed Kidder’s statement about Café Presse. Madsen and other staff and faculty made use of the space during their break hours. Whether he was trying to escape his office or had time between lectures, Madsen could be found grabbing a snack at Café Presse or sitting down for dinner and wine.

“You could go over there, you could have a good lunch, without breaking the bank. If you were meeting with a group of people, it was a great place to go because if they were all on campus, you could get out of your office and go over there,” Madsen said. “It was almost an adjunct of Seattle U. It was a Seattle U space, at least as far as those of us on the faculty are concerned. Staff were over there all the time as well.”

Despite their closures in Capitol Hill, both have connections with other businesses in the area. Café Pettiroso advises its customers to visit their owners at their other restaurant, Bang Bang Café. Drohman and Herron’s other restaurant, Le Pichet located in Belltown, will remain open through at least the end of 2023. Café Presse’s chef, Grayson Corrales, will be taking over the space this spring. Corrales plans to run her first restaurant, Maripili, in Presse’s place, where she will serve Spanish style tapas.

Café Pettiroso officially closed for business Feb 6. Café Presse’s last days are this weekend, closing permanently Feb 13. While they are no longer accepting reservations or providing take-out options, members of the Seattle U community are encouraged to stop by and share stories with the staff before parting ways.