

**FAMILY REVIVING FAMOUS INN
Young Ardivinos Open Banquet Hall
In Anapra, N.M.**

By Kim Baca
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From the 1950s into the '70s, it was the place to be.

Tucked away facing Mount Cristo Rey in Anapra, N.M., Ardivino's Roadside Inn was a desert oasis hidden away like a prized castle or a paradise fortress.

Now, family members hope to rekindle some of the once-famous restaurant's magic. They have opened the former facility as a banquet hall.

Back in its heyday, you had to make a reservation to make sure you had a seat in what was known as one of the best restaurants around.

"That was the place to go because it was so exclusive," said Marvin Nicchio, a Northeast resident who arrived in El Paso from New York as a 19-year-old *ragazzo* (lad).

New in town, he needed a place to impress the ladies.

"It had a lot of class, a lot of ambience," Nicchio said. "It was like a fancy club and fancy restaurant. As soon as you walked into the restaurant, you felt catered to and pampered."

Frank Ardivino, known to patrons and friends as Uncle Frank, came to El Paso with the U.S. Army to fight the war against Pancho Villa.

Liking the Southwest and the desert landscape, Ardivino was discharged from the

Army and settled on the 33-acre Anapra site in 1948.

On it was a ranch house which was later turned into the eatery that would be featured in "Life Magazine," "Ford Times Cookbook," and receive a three-star rating in the "Mobile Travel Guide" for more than a decade.



Karl Branch / El Paso Times
Marina and Robert Ardivino hope to recapture the magic—and success—of their great uncle Frank Ardivino's Roadside Inn with a banquet hall on the site of the original restaurant.

Although the restaurant has been closed for the last 18 years and Frank Ardivino passed on in 1973, the atmosphere and panache of Ardivino's has not been forgotten. It is now being revived by the founder's grand nephew and niece, Robert and Marina Ardivino.

Together the siblings are carrying on the ambiance and style of Uncle Frank's restaurant as Ardivino's Desert Crossing, a banquet facility.

"Outdoor entertaining is key in El Paso with all the great weather," said Robert Ardivino, who now lives in the one of the two buildings adjacent to the restaurant. "Our plan is to have a very nice facility, the nicest place in the Southwest."

The Desert Crossing is partially so named because the property—just a few yards from the U.S.-Mexico border—is a popular spot for illegal border crossers.

But the new Ardivinos may not be a restaurant soon. The two siblings grew up in the restaurant business and know what to expect. They served as cashiers and waiters for their father, Joe Ardivino, who learned the business from Uncle Frank.

Their father came from New York to help Uncle Frank in the '40s and then took over as manager as until he opened his own Italian eatery, the well-known Ardivino's in Kern Place. Their parents now retired, sold the West Side business.

"We know how hard it is," Marina Ardivino, 27, said. "And if we were going to (open a restaurant) it would have to be first class all the way just like my uncle did.

With 33 acres, the old restaurant and dance hall, the ideas for revitalization seem endless.

"This place, it just screams festivity," Robert Ardivino said. "It's got a great feeling out here. I love the fact that you can see old Mexico and New Mexico (the property) has been entertaining its entire life and it was basically built for entertaining."

Robert Ardivino, 28, is also a photographer and has plans for a photo art gallery on the site and hopes to have other artists live in the buildings his family have built. His uncle's restaurant was also known as a show-place for the El Paso Art Society and contemporary Southwestern art.

The young Ardivinos have also considered other uses for the property including turning the original Roadside Inn into a bed and breakfast or renovating the swimming pool and using it for the extravagant parties Uncle Frank was known for.

"The possibilities seem endless with a facility like this," Marina Ardivino said. "But we are trying to keep the same classic, elegant style, where its still rustic but still classic—and has the flavor of the Old West.

Both believe Uncle Frank would have wanted it that way.

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