



## AMPHORA **Amphora Group History**

Founders Louis Cholakis and George Bilidas had a simple dream back in 1962, to open their own neighborhood restaurant providing fresh, high-quality food at reasonable prices. After 45 years of tireless work, that dream has developed into a successful multi-unit family-run business including Amphora Restaurant and Amphora's Diner Deluxe, Amphora Catering, and Amphora Bakery, employing over 200 people.

Both George Bilidas and Louis Cholakis emigrated from villages outside Sparta, Greece, in the mid 1950s. After several years learning their trade by washing dishes and waiting tables at restaurants up and down the East Coast, they settled in Washington, D.C. Their dream of owning a restaurant became a reality in 1962 when they pooled all their resources and bought the Rollin Road Restaurant, one of the few food establishments in then-sleepy Vienna, Virginia. Louis Cholakis worked behind the scenes in the kitchen, while George Bilidas was the front man concentrating on pleasing each customer. Borrowing from the traditional neighborhood "tavernas" experience back in their Grecian villages, the Bilidas-Cholakis team prepared fresh specials daily and got to know all their regular customers. This formula proved very effective.

By the mid 1970s, the Rollin Road had garnered a core of regular customers. After 15 years of hard-earned success, Cholakis and Bilidas decided to expand. They determined that Northern Virginia was ready for a New York Style Diner Concept – a 24-hour, 7 day a week establishment offering a wide variety of freshly prepared breakfast, lunch and dinner menu items *available all day*. Hence was born the Amphora Restaurant. The name Amphora, a two-handled ancient Greek food storage vase, was chosen to harken back to the owners Greek roots. An informal survey of local customers revealed that the word "diner" conjured up images different from those that Bilidas and Cholakis envisioned, so it was intentionally left out of the name of the restaurant.

The flagship Amphora Restaurant was opened in December 1977. As is common with most diners, the restaurant was prefabricated by a diner manufacturer in New York State then trucked down to its present location and assembled. The Amphora was a popular destination from the start, proving popular with all ages and demographic groups. Nearly 25 years later, Amphora is considered a landmark in Vienna and has garnered many accolades for its food throughout the years.

Since its inception, desserts have been big business at Amphora. The freshly baked cakes and pies were in such demand that it seemed like a natural step to expand. The Amphora Bakery was opened in 1989 as a small outpost selling a selection of the cakes, pastries and pies available only at the Amphora Restaurant. It has since grown into a considerable retail and wholesale operation employing a team of 10 pastry chefs. European in style, Amphora Bakery offers a wide selection of award-winning cakes, French pastries, pies and cookies, as well as custom creations and wedding cakes.

In the 1990s, founders Louis Cholakis and George Bilidas retired, handing over the reins of the Amphora Restaurant Group to their children, Steve Bilidas, George Cholakis and Maria Cholakis. All three were eager to take over restaurant operations, building upon the solid foundation laid by their parents while creating a new vision for the future.

This new vision included a full-service catering department, which would complement existing group operations and utilize all the resources readily available at the Amphora Restaurant and Amphora Bakery. Today, Amphora Catering has grown into a leading corporate and social caterer in the D.C metro area. Amphora Catering events include everything from an intimate brunch for 10 to a wedding for 600.

In 1997, the Cholakis & Bilidas families embarked on their biggest venture to date. Amphora's Diner Deluxe, a 16,000-square-foot building with a seating capacity of 300 and a private banquet room. The facility also encompasses an on-premises bakery capable of supplying all the locations under the Amphora umbrella with breads and other retail items. Although larger in scale, the concept is the same as the Amphora Restaurant in Vienna, a 24-hour, 7 day a week establishment. Like its sister restaurant, the Amphora's Diner Deluxe has received a number of accolades including "Best Late night Dining" and "Best Sunday Brunch" from *Washingtonian* magazine readers.

Although Vienna and the whole of Northern Virginia have grown considerably in the past four decades and bear little resemblance to the sleepy suburbs of the 1960s, the Bilidas-Cholakis formula remains the same. The winning combination of providing freshly prepared food at reasonable prices, keeping regular customers happy, and turning new customers into loyal ones has kept the Amphora Restaurant and all its offspring at the forefront of the dining market in the Washington area.