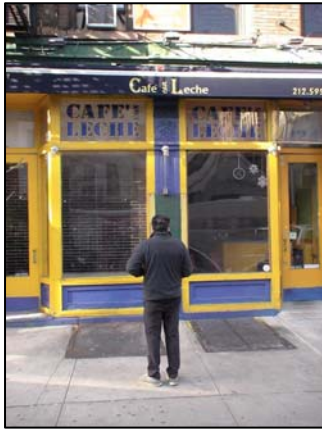


Monday, January 5, 2015

UPTOWN NEWS**Upper West Side eatery splits for E. Harlem**

A steep rent increase forced the popular Latino restaurant Cafe Con Leche out of its longtime home, owners say.

BY RAY MONELL



The owner of a beloved Latino eatery is putting a modern-day spin on what it means to be “upwardly mobile” in New York.

Facing a precipitous rent hike, Jesus Martinez had no choice but to pull up stakes on Café Con Leche, moving the popular spot uptown and across the park from its longtime location on the Upper West Side.

“People cried, but it was impossible to stay there,” said Martinez, explaining that he simply couldn’t afford the \$25,000 per month he was being asked to pay in a new lease. The sum amounted to a doubling of his previous rent, he said, and that meant something had to give.

Fortunately, he found a storefront on Second Ave., between E. 104th and E. 105th Sts. in East Harlem, where Martinez says his dining area will be roomier and his rent will cost less than the \$11,500 he and his former partner were paying to lease the quarter-century-old haunt at 424 Amsterdam Ave.

“Thank God we’re moving to this place,” said Martinez, who is retaining all six of his employees and expects to reopen within weeks.

Martinez emigrated from Guerrero, Mexico, in 1987. He started working at Café Con Leche in 1993; in 2010, he and a co-worker, Fernando Garcia, teamed up to buy the place.

It sounds like the prototypical American success story, but this effort to outrun the city’s skyrocketing rental market adds a contemporary twist.

“That’s what the market is,” said Faith Hope Consolo, the chairwoman of Douglas Elliman’s retail group. “That neighborhood is very, very strong, and it’s got good traffic. And I just think, you know, they can ask anything they want.”

James Famularo of Eastern Consolidated, the agent who is handling the listing, said he has received “non-stop inquiries” about the 1,200-square-foot space on Amsterdam at W. 80th. He is asking a \$30,000 monthly rent, he said, and expects to have the storefront leased soon.

The biggest losers here may be Café Con Leche’s longtime patrons — who came to rely on the restaurant’s appetizing, yet reasonably priced, fare.

“Outside of the pubs, it’s hard to find a good restaurant that’s not really expensive now,” said Julie Kinkle, a seller of used books who had been bringing her 8-year-old son, Django, there since he was a toddler. “So this was a haven for people who are like me: just still getting by.”