

add things to it, changing things and giving more flavor to it. That's how it started." She adds, "And people started loving it."

Albaadani lived in Eugene for six years before opening the restaurant, initially coming to study at Lane Community College and later the University of Oregon. She quickly earned a reputation as an adept preparer of comfort food for homesick Middle Eastern international students. When an American friend told her he would happily pay \$20 for a plate of her food, an idea took root, although her lunch and dinner prices currently range from \$10 to \$16.

Albaadani says many of the recipes come from her mother, who is known to stop by now and then to see how things are going. But the details of those recipes are closely guarded. Sometimes a customer inquires about a recipe, but Albaadani's mother conveniently dodges the question with the classic line: "I can't tell you that; that's a family secret."

Aside from top-secret recipes, Albaadani says her vision for the restaurant is about sharing Middle Eastern food with people who may not have had the real thing. That's the rationale behind the name, particularly the "network" part. "It's connecting," Albaadani says, "connecting the American culture with my culture and the Middle Eastern culture, through the food."

Albaadani and her mother redecorated the 18th and Willamette location with blue and gold accents, complete with antique lamps from Turkey. Middle Eastern-style music plays quietly in the background. They currently serve breakfast, as well as lunch and dinner, offering an opportunity to try Middle Eastern breakfast standards like *labneh*, a yogurt cheese, or *motabq*, bread filled with eggs, tomatoes and green onions.

Albaadani acknowledges that appreciation for un-Americanized Middle Eastern food may come as a challenge for some. "But others come here and say, 'Thank you for doing this. It really does taste like home cooking.'"

*Mediterranean Network Restaurant is at 1810 Willamette Street and is open every day from 10 am to 3 pm and 5 to 10 pm except for Tuesdays, when the restaurant is only open 5 to 10 pm. Find the restaurant on Facebook for more.*

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