

## YOUSSEF Z. "JOE" CHAHINE



Youssef Zaidan Chahine, better known as Joe, age 76, of Brookline, passed away on May 30, 2024, surrounded by family and close friends after a sudden decline of his health. Outside of his friends and family, most people in the Pittsburgh community knew Joe as the warm and welcoming owner of Brookline's iconic Pitaland Mediterranean Bakery. Through his faith in God, love for his family, and ability to

bridge cultures through food, Joe embodied the American Dream.

Joe is survived by his devoted wife, Jocelyne. The couple's marriage represents the ideal lifelong partnership built on love, mutual admiration and respect. In family gatherings, Joe was known to break out in a song or poem professing his love and devotion to Jocelyne, beautifully crafted in Arabic his native language. In January of this year, Joe and Jocelyne celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary.

Joe is also survived by his four children, Aleen Atencio (Paul), Danny Chahine (Jourdan), Donna Tweardy (Greg), and Joseph Chahine (Alicia); and sisters, Dalal Romah and Nafle Abdulnour, each of Pittsburgh, and sister, Aziza Bechara of Sydney, AU. Joe was preceded in death by brothers, Jamil and George and sisters Saada and Wadad. Joe adored his grandchildren George and Grace Atencio, Jackson and Cameron Tweardy, and Layla and Lilyana Chahine; as well as his many brothers, sisters-in-law and nieces, nephews, here and abroad.

Joe's life was a journey of perseverance through faith. Joe was born January 21, 1948, to Zaidan and Zakiyah Chahine in Sir El Dennyeh, Lebanon. Joe started out as a schoolteacher in Lebanon teaching French, maintaining friendships with some of his students throughout his life. It was at this time he met and married Jocelyne. The young couple set off for their honeymoon in America in March 1974. They traveled to Pittsburgh to visit relatives and planned to stay a month in America. Violence in Joe's native Lebanon leading up to the Lebanese Civil War of 1975 made it too dangerous for them to return. Their visas were extended three times and the couple was eventually granted political asylum.

Receiving American citizenship was a pivotal moment in Joe's life and he would often speak of the joy and peace he received from knowing that his native-born children would not have to leave their home. The couple raised their children in Brookline and later Bethel Park, and most recently moved to Scott Township. Joe loved and celebrated the country that embraced and nurtured his family, ending many prayers over family meals with a sincere, "And God bless America!". The highlights of many Independence Day cookouts were Joe's award-winning ribs.

Once Joe realized he could not return to Lebanon, Joe went to work baking pita bread for his brother, George Chahine who in 1969 had built a brick oven in another Brookline Boulevard location. The pair slid the loaves in and out of the small oven using a shovel and worked together until 1980. Borrowing money from family and friends, Joe, his brother-in-law George Kazour and their spouses bought the business from George Chahine who was ready to move on. Over the next ten years, they expanded production by purchasing larger and more efficient equipment at auctions. Through farmer's markets, Joe extended Pitaland's presence across the city making many friends and loyal customers along the way. In 1990, Chahine's Bakery morphed into Pitaland with the purchase of the building where the bakery, grocery and café continues to thrive to this day.

In 2002, Joe acquired the interest of his brother-in-law. The succeeding years brought changes and growth. One of the greatest sources of pride for Joe was having his children join the family business. Through their combined efforts, Pitaland was expanded in 2013 through an extensive remodel of the building and the addition of a new state-of-the-art oven and café. Through Joe's vision, the pita bread oven was moved from the basement to the main floor adding a large window in the wall between the store and bakery so that customers could see their bread being made. Joe took great pleasure in welcoming tours of the bakery to visitors where he would regale them with stories and treat them to a traditional Mediterranean breakfast.

A parishioner of Our Lady of Victory Maronite Catholic Church, Joe was a man of deep and unwavering faith and a pillar of the Maronite community.

Growing a business was not an easy task and the stress and long hours of physical labor took its toll on Joe's health. Yet, Joe was always grateful to God who had always provided for his family. Joe continuously sought to return the blessings he had received through generosity to others. Joe opened his home to family and friends who had likewise fled the violence of the Lebanese Civil War and found them work and supported their pursuit of higher education in America. Pitaland was the first stop for many immigrants and transplants to the City of Pittsburgh. Joe and his family helped people by offering them employment, assisting with connecting them to public resources and registering their children for school, joining a place of worship, and even opening his home for temporary housing to those in need.

Joe's passion for feeding others went beyond bread. Joe was an avid and creative gardener in keeping with his native roots. Joe loved fig, cherry and almond trees and loved feeding his grandchildren corn on the cob and freshly sliced tomatoes straight from his garden and delighting them with the proclamation, "sweet like sugar."

Joe's passing in the early morning hours was fitting for how he started nearly every day of his life. Joe faced each day with dignity waking up well before 5:00 a.m. to open the bakery. Joe's last breaths were strong and powerful as he fought to continue to live for his family as he was being called to the loving embrace of his Creator. By the grace of God his final day was spent in his home surrounded by family. Although Joe could not fully articulate his thoughts during those final hours his eyes expressed serenity and the love he felt for those he cared for most. Pittsburgh has lost a hero in Joe Chahine and his presence will be greatly missed. The example Joe set for a life well lived will never be forgotten.

Friends will be received for a memorial visitation at Our Lady of Victory Church, 1000 Tropical Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15216, 412-278-0841 on Friday, June 7, 2024, from 2:00 p.m. until the service of incense at 7:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy will be held on Saturday, June 8, 2024, at 11:00 a.m. at Our Lady of Victory Church, 1000 Tropical Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15216, followed by interment at Queen of Heaven Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Saint Sharbel Spiritual Life Center, 820 Crane Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15216, <https://www.saintsharbelcenter.org/donate> or Our Lady of Victory Maronite Catholic Church, <https://www.olovpgh.org>.

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