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### Handke's Cuisine gets new owners *Monique Curet*

#### *THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH*

**Handke's** Cuisine, ranked for several years as the best restaurant in the state, is no longer owned by its star chef.

Hartmut Handke, Columbus' only master chef certified by the American Culinary Federation, sold his restaurant this week to T&L Cuisine, owned by husband and wife Tim and Lorie Phalen.

The sale price was not disclosed.

The restaurant will keep its name, and Tim Phalen said no immediate changes to the menu or the business are planned.

Handke, who is semi-retired, will continue to teach monthly cooking classes and cook for some catered events and special dinners. Asa Rodriguez, who apprenticed under Handke for three years, is now the chef.

"It's a good feeling to leave that kitchen in good hands," Handke said.

He decided to sell because he wants more free time to travel, visit his daughters and spend time with his wife, Margot, a familiar face in the front of the house at **Handke's**.

The chef said people used to ask him how much time he spent at his restaurant. Handke would tell them, "Ask me how many hours I spend at home. That's easier to count."

**Handke's** opened in 1991 at 520 S. Front St. in the Brewery District. The restaurant, which seats 160 in the main dining areas, is housed in a former 19th-century brewery and features classic and updated European and American cuisine.

It has won many accolades, including being named the top restaurant in the state in the 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 Zagat Surveys.

"I was looking for a fine-dining opportunity," said Tim Phalen, who recently moved to Columbus from Cincinnati and also owns a restaurant in Oxford, Ohio. He will serve as **Handke's** owner/manager.

For restaurants that carry a chef's name, "if the chef leaves, it loses its star power," said Robert Welcher, president of Restaurant Consultants Inc. of Columbus.

But the restaurant probably will maintain its quality, he said. The deal that transpired at **Handke's**, with Handke staying on in a limited capacity, "sounds like the scenario that had to happen to maintain the restaurant."

Without Handke at the helm, the restaurant "won't be quite the same, but even coming close is exceptional," Welcher said.

mcuret@dispatch.com

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