

# Not ready to relish retirement

Cook can't quite leave  
"family" at La Comida

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Delia Haines cooks chile rellenos for customers at La Comida, where she has worked for 34 years.

The spirit is willing, but the body hurts – especially the arms.

Delia Haines has worked at La Comida restaurant for 34 years. She was prepared to go on another 34 years – or at least until she turned 70 – but the tendonitis in her arms was starting to bother her. It was getting hard for her to stir her pots and haul her pans around the kitchen.

"I think my body was saying 'stop'. Other than that I'd still be at it," she said. "When it comes to work, I'm a glutton for punishment. I just love my job."

Despite the signals her body is sending, Haines hasn't quite stopped. She still works at La Comida nine hours a week and calls it "retirement". She is trying to figure out what to do with the rest of her time. "The week before I retired, I was screaming and crying and having anxiety attacks," she said. "I didn't want to leave."

Most people who start work at 6 every morning and spend five or six hours "prepping" – cooking 100 pounds of hamburger, 150 pounds of beans and "I can't tell you how much rice" – might spend a lot of time thinking about leaving. But not Haines.

Sometimes she would come in at 3 or 4, to stock shelves and clean the office. "I had my nose in everything." She has never called in sick and has not taken a 2 week vacation since 1985.

That's because life at La Comida isn't about work, it's about family.

Her bosses have been life family. When she started, she worked for Mike Pavis, who opened La Comida in 1968. Later, she worked for his son, Mike Pavis Jr., known as "J.R." She said both generations of Pavises have treated her well. "I never wanted for anything."

Her customers have been life family. "We've had people coming in here for 35 years. They're still eating what they were eating 35 years ago. We get to know our customers. They invite us to their parties. And we invite them to our staff parties."

Several members of her family have all worked here. "All of my kids, nieces, nephews." One of her daughters, Gloria "Sissy" McGinnis, has been at La Comida for 22 years. She's taken over her mother's job as prep cook and expects to stay there until she's ready to retire.

"By the time I get to by my mother's age, I will have worked here for about 45 years."

McGinnis said her mother's been at La Comida so long she is becoming a celebrity. "Everybody in town knows her. Even when she's not at work they will come up to her."