

KEY COLONY INN CLOSES

By **Alex Rickert** - July 10, 2025



The Key Colony Inn restaurant closed its doors on July 6 after owners Ali and Andy Baker left the Middle Keys, telling staff a day later via text message. As of July 8, the building had no sign announcing the closure. ALEX RICKERT/Keys Weekly

As the holiday weekend came to a close, one of the Middle Keys' most popular eateries shut its doors – and both the staff and the building's owner say they were just as surprised as the patrons.

Questions began percolating on social media as the Key Colony Inn did not open for normal business hours on July 6 and 7, leaving kitchen staff, bartenders and servers in limbo until Monday afternoon.

"On Saturday, I went in there and I noticed we were running out of food," bartender Ashley Seiple told the Weekly. "The beer was low, and the wine, and I noticed that there was no schedule put out – we always get a schedule."

The next morning, Seiple said, she got a text from the restaurant's daytime bartender asking why the Inn was closed.

"I said I had no idea," she said. "I thought he was (messing) with me. Only one person got a text (from the owners). The kitchen staff showed up here yesterday and were told 'no work today.'"

Calls and texts to owners Ali and Andy Baker reportedly went unanswered until July 7, when staff received a text message from the Bakers' attorney, Rich Malafy.

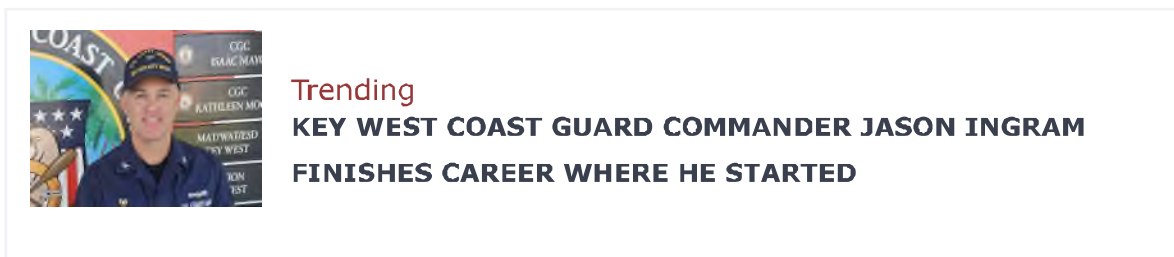
"Unfortunately, I have been given the very difficult task of informing you that as of last night the Inn under the ownership of Ali and Andy is no longer and is closed," the message read. "Ali and Andy would like you to know that they tried their best and literally put everything they had into keeping the Inn alive but ultimately were unable to do so.

"Ali and Andy have asked me to pass along that they are truly thankful for everything you have done to try to make the Inn a success and that they are sorry it has come to this."

Employees told the Weekly the apartment above the restaurant, where the Bakers had been living, had been cleared out, and that there had been no word on the status of outstanding paychecks and tip-outs.

The 11,000-square-foot building at 700 West Ocean Drive is owned by Harry and Donna Kirchner, the original owners of the Key Colony Inn restaurant since its inception in 1990. It is currently listed for sale at \$3.5 million, with 100% of the space listed as leased. The Bakers purchased the business, long regarded as a community center in Key Colony Beach, in 2020 from previous owner Lena Proudnik.

Speaking with the Weekly on July 8, Harry Kirchner said the closure was a complete surprise to him as well, learning from acquaintances that the restaurant hadn't been open on Sunday before eventually getting a call from Malafy.



Kirchner said he'd met with the Bakers just six weeks prior to discuss proceeding with the second half of their "5+5"-year lease signed in August 2020. At that time, he said, potential buyers for the property were also interested in buying out the business – an offer the Bakers eventually declined.

"They said, we feel like we're there and we're going to take our next five (years) because we think we can turn this thing around," Kirchner said. "So this was a shock to me, because I gave (them) an out, and they didn't take it."

"I never heard from the tenants (directly), and I still haven't," he added. "It wasn't any kind of bad blood thing – I've had a very decent relationship with them as a landlord for a long time. The final straw, what it is, honestly, I have no idea."

On Tuesday, Malafy told the Weekly the Bakers were exploring options to resolve payroll issues after leaving Marathon and turning the property back over to Kirchner.

Asked if the building would eventually reopen as a restaurant, Kirchner said: "that's a definite yes."

"I'll be coming down there now to clear it all out, clean, paint, put the whole thing back together and make sure it's in top shape," he said. "And the next thing we'll be looking for is a buyer to come in there and put the place back on the map."



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A call and voicemail to Ali Baker had not been returned at press time.

ALEX RICKERT

Alex Rickert made the perfectly natural career progression from dolphin trainer to newspaper editor in 2021 after freelancing for Keys Weekly while working full time at Dolphin Research Center. A resident of Marathon since 2015, he fell in love with the Florida Keys community by helping multiple organizations and friends rebuild in the wake of Hurricane Irma. An avid runner, actor, and spearfisherman, he spends as much of his time outside of work on or under the sea having civil disagreements with sharks.