



'It's a very good opportunity,' says vendor paying for prime spot

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MICHAEL STUPARYK/TORONTO STAR

Seemab Ahmad, seen beside the sculpture The Archer, will sell central Asian and Persian food from a cart at Nathan Phillips Square.

Man who operates three fast-food restaurants faced complicated application process to get cart

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CITY HALL BUREAU

Seemab Ahmad may be a civil engineer by training, but now he has a new passion – food.

And those who want to try his central Asian and Persian cuisine will be able to buy it from a cart on the east side of Nathan Phillips Square, beginning in May.

"For me, this was my hobby – to get into the competition. That was a challenge, especially the application process," said Ahmad, of the hoops he had to jump through to win a coveted spot on the city's signature square.

He will be shelling out more than \$20,000 to buy a city-mandated cart, plus licensing costs and a \$15,000 location fee – but the 50-year-old projects confidence.

Ahmad currently operates three fast-food restaurants on College St. in the heart of the University of Toronto campus. His wife and grown children work in the family business. A native of Pakistan, when he talks about his menu for the new cart, a sense of pride is evident.

"Biryani is a basmati rice dish with a delicate blend of spices, saffron and some vegetables and meat," Ahmad said. "We make curry, then steam rice into the curry so the flavour of curry comes into the rice, but it's not soggy."

Because his restaurants are nearby, it should be easy for him to replenish his cart, since the city has strict rules about where the food must be prepared.

Ahmad believes it's time for Toronto to have different foods on the streets, noting that a variety is offered in U.S. cities.

"People want to hang out, especially in the downtown. It's a very good opportunity."