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### A place to deal and eat

#### Pascal's a focal point for blacks and whites

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A look at the business empire founded by brothers Robert and James **Pascal**, whose **Pascal's** Restaurant has been an Atlanta landmark since 1959, and whose La Carrousel Lounge has attracted some of the best known performers in the jazz world. Singing great Lena Horne is savvy about Atlanta. After donning black robes to receive an honorary degree at Spelman College recently, and making a stirring commencement speech to 298 graduates about "who will solve the battles of the 1990s," she knew exactly what to do.

She sidled into her limousine and headed a half-mile out Martin Luther King Jr. Drive to **Pascal's** Restaurant for a fried chicken dinner.

Miss Horne thus joined a long parade of musicians, athletes, politicians, civil rights campaigners and power brokers who have been eating and dealing at this unpretentious, storefront landmark since it opened in 1959.

"Oh, honey, we treated her royally - like we do all our customers," says Orah Belle Sherman, maitre d' at **Pascal's** for 24 years. Robert **Pascal**, the 78-year-old chef and partner in his 65-year-old brother James' three business corporations, deep-fried some chicken from his equally deep-secret recipe. "All juicy and mellow on the inside without the crust being greasy," as Mrs. Sherman describes it.

Miss Horne and her retinue also gobbled spicy candied yams. Succulent beans fresh off the pole. Pungent collards. And piping hot corn muffins. Your typical Southern special at **Pascal's**.

"We've seen `em all in here, and the atmosphere is so beautiful -black and white together," says Mrs. Sherman. Everyone from Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Bunche, Stokely Carmichael, John Lewis, Julian Bond, Dominique Wilkins, Count Basie and Stevie Wonder to Bobby Kennedy, Ralph McGill, Marvin Griffin, Jimmy Carter, Gary Hart and Lester Maddox.

"Maddox went over real good here; you'd be surprised," Mrs. Sherman says. The ardent segregationist was running for governor at the time, and he came seeking votes - not with ax handles from his defunct restaurant. "White folks who had tasted his Pickrick chicken said it couldn't compare with **Pascal's**," she says with a giggle.

Mrs. Sherman has one regret. "If only I'd been here the night of the shooting!" she stage-whispers. "I know how to make people feel happy and behave, with no fussing. If I see somebody wearing a hat, I smile sweetly and say, `Jim, it's our policy for gentlemen to remove their hats. Don't do it right now, sweetheart, but later on, when nobody's looking.' I have never once had to call the police. Not even at the height of the civil rightsdemonstrations."

But Mrs. Sherman was off duty on May 11, a supposedly quiet Monday, when the boss's 30-year-old son, **Curtis**, was shot in the chest by a customer angered at being asked to take off his hat. The scene was La Carrousel Lounge, the 250-seat modern jazz nightclub that has flourished as a basement adjunct to **Pascal's** since 1960.

James **Pascal** was off, too, at his churchlike home on Kingsdale Drive. The onetime shoeshine boy and Pullman porter received an anxious phone call from his restaurant about 10:30 p.m. He and his wife Phyllis rushed to Grady Hospital, where their only child lay critically wounded.

"**Curtis** is an extremely strong young man," says **Pascal**, measuring out words in his low-key style. "Even though he was on the operating table most of the night, two days later he was able to get up and go home. I thank the good Lord for that. He's back at work now."

A former Marine and an avid private pilot, **Curtis** occasionally works nights at La Carrousel - as do all the family members, even James **Pascal's** oldest brother, Gilmore, 80, a peppery, retired chauffeur for a New York garment

manufacturer.

Eventually, **Curtis** will inherit his father's half of the **Paschal** business ventures - of which **Paschal's** Restaurant and La Carrousel represent only the tip of the iceberg at present. Total 1986 sales volume of the three **Paschal** corporations was estimated at \$16.2 million.

Take **Curtis'** living quarters, for example. He has a suite in **Paschal's** Motor Hotel, the six-story, 125-room hostelry his father and uncle Robert erected behind their restaurant in 1967. The beige-and-silver motel was jammed with mourners of both races when King's funeral was held in Atlanta in April 1968. It continues to thrive on conventions and bridge-club weekenders, who also fill up its eight meeting rooms. So much so that James **Paschal** says he has bought land for a future 125-room annex and parking garage.

With a smile and a wave, **Paschal** declines to talk about his three private corporations. But a Dun & Bradstreet report shows the motel, plus the restaurant and nitery, incorporated as **Paschal** Brothers Enterprises, rang up \$1.32 million in sales last year - down slightly from the peak year of \$1.36 million in 1981.

Why the decline? Some entrepreneurs say it's because La Carrousel no longer consistently offers the big-name musicians that used to pack people in week after week, often in a 60-40 ratio of whites to blacks. Many of the stars are performing elsewhere. Also, the thrill of "integrating" **Paschal's** to hear Dizzy Gillespie and Aretha Franklin, experienced by some white customers in the 1960s, is gone.

In addition, many Atlanta blacks no longer automatically consider **Paschal's** their political and social hub. Slowly, but surely, they are spreading more of their meetings and dollars among Northside establishments that once shunned them.

During working hours, **Curtis** is chief accountant for **Paschal** Concessions Inc. (PCI), which operates seven restaurants and bars at Hartsfield International Airport. (Recently, he also launched his own airport limousine service, with two vehicles.) It is estimated that PCI's sales volume is similar to that of the **Paschal** complex on King Drive.

But PCI is small potatoes compared to the company it leases space from - the Dobbs-**Paschal** Midfield Corp., a 75-25 percent joint venture between Chicago-based Dobbs Houses Inc. and, you guessed it, the **Paschal** brothers.

Jim Cranford, Atlanta airport business manager, says Dobbs-**Paschal** grossed \$54.33 million in sales last year - rent payments, food, drink, shop items, haircuts and other services. The **Paschal** slice of that would be \$13.58 million, with profits considered lucrative, especially on concession rents. One duty-free shop operator recently pulled out of the airport terminal, complaining his \$520,000-a-year rent was too high.

Cranford says the city awarded Dobbs-**Paschal** a 15-year contract to operate airport concessions. The corporation will pay the city a total of \$240 million, in increments that increase steadily from \$6 million in 1980 to \$10.1 million in 1986 to \$32 million in 1995.

"**Paschal** was one of the prominent food and beverage operators in Atlanta's black community. The city wanted a minority joint venture, and they gave us the desired mix," Cranford says.

What will happen in 1995, when he will be 73, James **Paschal** doesn't know. But one thing is for sure: As long as he's healthy, he won't retire from the business he relishes seven days a week.

He strolls into the bright coffee shop and the chandeliered red-and-black restaurant, glad-handing lawyers, contractors, bookies and college students. A sign reads: "Please No Loitering. If you're not ordering, you're loitering. If you've been served and paid your check, no standing around in the Isle."

He pops through the swinging doors to the kitchen, where his brother is rescuing golden chicken from a deep sink that bubbles like hot lava. "I use a certain oil and a certain mix, but I ain't telling anybody," Robert **Paschal** says, moving gingerly in his white apron and Reebok tennis shoes. "That's been my secret since 1947. You'll notice James is going bald because he's scratching his head over the IRS all the time. But I've got all my hair, even if it's turned gray, 'cause I love cooking this chicken 12 hours a day."

James **Paschal** had a head for business even as a youngster in Thomson, Ga., where his father was a hotel waiter. While going to McDuffie County Training School, a black high school that mainly turned out farmers, young **Paschal** built a shoeshine stand and hired two boys to work for him. Then he expanded into cosmetic sales and a newspaper route.

"Pretty soon I had enough money to lease a store across from the high school, selling ice cream, soda pop and

groceries," **Paschal** recalls. "It was quite successful. So I added meats, sandwiches, amusement machines and a place to dance."

Drafted in 1942, he served with the field artillery in Oklahoma. In 1945 he joined the Pullman Co. Sure, he had to smile when flipped 50-cent pieces by cocky white men, but "being a Pullman porter was considered a fine job for a young colored man in those days." He served on sleeper trains from coast to coast, and took time to observe hotel and restaurant operations on layovers in New York, Chicago and San Francisco.

He never returned to South Georgia. "Robert was manager of a Jacobs drugstore fountain right here on Hunter Street M.L. King Drive. I sort of haunted him to go into business with me." They bought equipment, leased a store across the street from their present place and opened the **Paschal** Brothers Sandwich Shop in 1947. "Before long, we had a good lunch crowd, so we brought hot meals from Robert's house by taxicab." Next they expanded into the house in back and built their own kitchen.

The big move came in 1959, when they replaced a gasoline station with the first of many units at their present complex.

"That was the height of the civil rights era," **Paschal** recalls. "The college students and their leaders would meet for breakfast before going downtown to demonstrate against segregation. They'd be arrested in large groups, and sometimes the fingerprinting and bail would take until 1 or 2 a.m. Their parents would gather in the restaurant, and many times we'd serve them a fried chicken supper on the house."

King, Ralph Abernathy, Andrew Young and other lieutenants conferred countless times at the restaurant while working their non-violent revolution. "It got to be a daily routine," says **Paschal**. "They planned the march on the Selma Ala. bridge right here, and the 'I have a dream speech' in Washington. I have to knock on wood - we never had any trouble until the shooting incident with my son."

Twenty-eight years after it all started at **Paschal's**, you can still smell the power in the air along with the fried chicken. Color Photos: James, 65, and chef Robert, 78, (above) opened The **Paschal** Brothers Sandwich Shop in 1947. **Curtis** (right, with his father at La Carrousel) eventually will inherit James' half of the business./ANDY SHARP/Staff Photo: James **Paschal**./Steve Deal/Staff

Photo: Civil rights Center: Facade of **Paschal's** Restaurant./Steve Deal/Staff

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