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BUSINESS REVIEW

Ypsilanti dining scene is growing

Sidetrack plans expansion, other downtown restaurants in works
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A longtime Depot Town destination is doubling in size while another unveils a new look, and three area businessmen are planning two new restaurants in downtown Ypsilanti, all signs that the community's revival is well under way.

Sidetrack Bar & Grill is expanding from 3,000 square feet to 6,000 square feet, taking over the space currently occupied by Frenchie's, said Linda French, who owns both restaurants.

Frenchie's will move to the space above Sidetrack, allowing the banquet business to grow from 125 seats to 200. That also leaves room upstairs for a new bar, which French plans to open later this year.



Sidetrack owner Linda French, right, with her daughter Jessica, who manages the restaurant.
PHOTO BY ROBERT RAMEY

"We've been wanting to do this forever," said French, who for 20 years has owned the three-story space that occupies both Sidetrack and Frenchie's.

"Sidetrack is so busy, (and) we thought we would just use Frenchie's for overflow. We never dreamt that Frenchie's would get so busy," she said.

While she declined to reveal specifics, she said that Frenchie's, which opened in 2003 and is used only for private parties and Sidetrack

INSIDE

Business

- » American Biz Daily
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- » Business Review
- » BusinessWire
- » NewsFlash
- » Newspapers
- » PR Newswire

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overflow, is booked Thursday through Sunday on a consistent basis.

Sidetrack's expansion is just one of many changes that are unfolding or have already unfolded in Ypsilanti's downtown dining scene.

Stewart Beal, president of Beal Properties LLC, and Jon Carlson, owner of Grizzly Peak Brewing Co. in Ann Arbor, plan to open a sushi restaurant on the ground floor of Beal's West Michigan Ave. loft complex, pending the purchase of a liquor license. The as-yet-unnamed sushi bar would total 2,700 square feet on two floors.

David Curtis, who owns Pub 13 and Club Divine in Ypsilanti, is looking at leasing 1,500 square feet on Washington Street for Jonathan Neils, a wine bar he hopes to open later this year. Jonathan Neils will offer wine, cheese, sandwiches, and wine classes, Curtis said.

Curtis also plans to add a rooftop deck and outdoor street-side seating to Pub 13 this year.

Meanwhile, in April another Ypsilanti restaurateur will unveil a whole new concept for a longtime Depot Town restaurant. Cady's Bar and Grill has a new look, a new menu, a new management team and a new chef, said Bill French, owner of Cady's and Aubree's Saloon in Ypsilanti.

"Cady's has been reborn," said French. While the old Cady's was more of a neighborhood family restaurant, the new Cady's will feature steaks, seafood and pasta in an updated environment that includes an indoor stone fireplace, a waterfall, and a locally inspired mural that spans the length of the dining room. "If you were an old customer, you just wouldn't recognize the place," he said.

French, who said the investment in Cady's changes was significant, added that some of the restaurant's signature dishes would remain on the menu. Entrees will be priced between \$11 and \$28 for dinner.

The new Cady's also will feature wine and single malt scotch "flights" six small samples, similar to what you'd find at a microbrewery, of wines or scotches that the customer chooses from the menu.

Cady's also increased its seating from 140 to 210 seats.

"Our goal is to have a destination restaurant," said Bill French. "We're taking advantage of Depot Town and our location."

Other expansions have already happened. Brian and Lisa Brickley, who own The Tap Room bar on Michigan Ave., opened The Tap Room Annex, a full service restaurant, in the former Louie's Café location earlier this year.

"I think it's something that a lot of us have been working on for many years, and I think it's starting to come into play now," said Curtis.

"I think one business person starts to exhibit confidence, and it's catchy.

It's contagious," said Bill French. "Other people start taking risks."


Construction on the Sidetrack project, which Linda French said is expected to begin "as soon as possible," will involve tearing down the wall that separates Sidetrack and Frenchie's. A staircase will be installed towards the front of the restaurant.

The new bar, to be located upstairs next to Frenchie's, will be geared towards older adults and will likely feature live jazz music. The entire project is expected to be complete by the end of the summer, and Linda French plans to hire an additional 30 employees. Sidetrack and Frenchie's together currently employ 55.

Linda French declined to disclose investment costs associated with Sidetrack's expansion. Stephen Rudner of Robert Darvas Associates in Ann Arbor is the structural engineer, and Don McMullen is the architect.

Jennifer Daniel Szymanski covers retail for Business Review.

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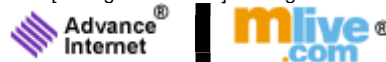


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