



No sign of eatery boom slowing

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SALEM — This city's economy is driven by tourism, the court system, and large institutions like Salem State College and the North Shore Medical Center. But the little guy on the block — the restaurant resurgence of the past decade — continues to flex its muscles.

Just weeks after the Edgewater Cafe closed its doors after seven years in Salem, another restaurant is lining up to take its place.

Adriatic Restaurant and Bar, which will offer a mix of Italian and European food, filed an application with the Licensing Board to take over the Edgewater's license at 155 Washington St. If the license transfer is approved, it will join a lineup of more than a dozen restaurants along Washington Street, several of which have opened in the past few years.

"I love Salem, I love everything about it," said Florian Cela, 21, a native of Albania who plans to run the restaurant with his older sister. "Salem is going to be like the new North End, and I want to be part of it."

The Salem Redevelopment Authority, meanwhile, is trying to land a restaurant for the Salem Jail, the nearly 200-year-old complex on St. Peter Street that is currently being converted into residences. The developer recently told the board that he is optimistic a restaurant operator will be announced soon.

Not all the restaurant news in Salem is about new businesses. A few weeks ago, the Lyceum, which has been in the city for 20 years, reopened on Church Street after a major renovation.

"I think Salem is really vying to be the top dining destination on the North Shore," said Matt Picarsic, a principal of RCG, the Somerville developer that rents space to more than a half-dozen restaurants that have opened in the past decade.

The biggest buzz this year was created when the operators of Tavern in the Square, who have two restaurants under the same name in Cambridge, opened a third, 300-seat establishment in Salem. Adriatic plans to open in the same Washington Street block.

"I think it's great for the city," said Mark Morris, one of the owners of Tavern in the Square. "As long as you have a good collection (of restaurants) with different styles of food, people are going to come. It's just giving people more (choice)."

Restaurants, of course, also have closed in the downtown environs. In addition to the Edgewater Cafe, Derby Fish & Lobster the Rockmore Dry Dock, both at Pickering Wharf, and T Restaurant on Congress Street have shut their doors in the past few years.

The Edgewater Cafe closed right after Halloween, the start of what traditionally is a slow time for downtown Salem businesses. Even in a down economy, however, the vacancy drew attention, according to RCG.

"There were multiple people interested in the location," Picarsic said.

The operators of Adriatic, who live in Lynn, said they jumped at the opportunity.

"We loved that location," said Eljonida Kurti, Cela's 26-year-old sister. "Every time we passed by, we said, 'Maybe we'll

have this one day."

The enterprising brother and sister are still college students. He hopes to graduate in May with a business degree from Wentworth Institute of Technology in Boston. She is a business major at Salem State College.

Both said they have experience in the restaurant business but have never owned their own place. Cela said he has worked in restaurants almost since coming to this country at the age of 13. Kurti's husband will be a chef at Adriatic.

"I'm not doing it all alone," Cela said. "I have family helping me out, as well."

If all goes well and they secure the necessary approvals, the siblings plan to renovate the storefront in the former Salem Evening News building, add a brick oven for pizza and open in a few months.

The Licensing Board hearing is scheduled for Dec. 14.

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