

Winnipeg Free Press - PRINT EDITION

# Patios popping up downtown

## 160-seat facility latest to make use of BIZ program

By: **Murray McNeill**

Posted: 03/12/2012 1:00 AM | Comments: 0 (including replies)



WAYNE GLOWACKI / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS [Enlarge Image](#)

*Michael Schafer, owner of Rudy's Eat & Drink, plans to open a 160-seat patio on the Graham Avenue side of the Manitoba Hydro building this summer.*

The owner of one of the downtown's newest eateries plans to steal a page from his suburban counterparts by opening what could be the area's biggest outdoor patio.

"People die for patios in this city," Rudy's Eat & Drink owner Michael Schafer said in an interview. "So it's

very beneficial to have a patio, even if it's just for three or four months of the year."

And if Mother Nature and the Winnipeg Jets co-operate, Schafer won't wait until summer to set up his 160-seat patio on the outdoor plaza that runs along the Graham Avenue side of Manitoba Hydro's downtown office tower.

Schafer said if the weather is decent and the Jets make the NHL playoffs, he'd like to have it open for the team's first home playoff game in early April. He's envisioning a football-style tailgating party, except it'll be for diehard hockey fans.

Schafer already has one big backer -- Stefano Grande, executive director of the Downtown Winnipeg Business Improvement Zone.

For the last five years, Grande's group has been quietly working behind the scenes to bring more outdoor patios to the downtown by offering to design the patio and handle all of the paperwork -- getting the design approved and obtaining a permit from the city -- on behalf of the business owners. In the case of smaller patios, it'll even supply fencing and patio furniture for the first year. All the businesses have to do is pay for the permit, which costs \$300 to \$500 for the season.

It has helped six restaurants so far under the pilot program, including two last year. Grande said it hopes to sign up at least four more for this year, with Rudy's already confirmed.

"There's nothing like a patio to promote a restaurant and there's nothing like a patio for allowing people to enjoy the summer," Grande said. "Patios also equate to vibrancy, so we want to see more patios in the downtown."

Last year the BIZ helped Marcello's Market & Deli and Green Leaf Healthy Cafe. Both are located on the main floor of the Hydro building -- Marcello's on the north side facing Portage Avenue and Green Leaf on the west side facing onto Edmonton Street.

Marcello's manager Jeff Li and Green Leaf franchisee Mel George said the experiment was successful and they both plan to have small patios again this summer.

In Marcello's case, it will likely have six to eight tables and 12 to 16 seats, Li said. Green Leaf plans eight tables and 24 seats.

"That size was very good (last year)," George said. "It was just the right size for the number of customers we get."

For Schafer, bigger is better. He wants to make Rudy's, which opened in January, a destination location. And he's convinced that having a big outdoor patio, with live entertainment on Thursday and Friday evenings and on Saturdays, will help to reel them in.

He's also hoping more downtown bars and restaurants jump on the patio bandwagon.

"I hope there are future plans for a lot more of these patios and businesses to open up. We need to recreate that Corydon/Osborne (Village) vibe."

Grande said CentreVenture Development Corp.'s plan to create a Sports, Hospitality and Entertainment District (SHED) in the MTS Centre/Winnipeg Convention Centre area would make it easier to accomplish that because it could provide a concentration of outdoor patios in a relatively small area.

"All of a sudden you've got a place for people to hang out in the downtown. And they wouldn't be worried about safety," he said.

Schafer said he wants just a waist-high fence, interspersed with giant planters, around his patio, half of which will be designated as a restaurant area and the other half a licensed lounge.

"I want to promote having open, friendly downtown space like they have in other cities. "I don't want them putting up a big, glass wall... I just think putting up a wall sends the wrong message, and I don't think people want to feel like they're sitting in a fortress. They want to feel like they're outside."

Schafer also praised the ongoing efforts by the city, Winnipeg Police Service and Downtown BIZ to make the downtown safer, saying it's having a noticeable impact.

Know of any newsworthy or interesting trends or developments in the local office, retail, or industrial real estate sectors? Let real estate reporter Murray McNeill know at the e-mail address below, or at 697-7254.

**[murray.mcneill@freepress.mb.ca](mailto:murray.mcneill@freepress.mb.ca)**

Info sessions underway

THE Downtown Winnipeg Business Improvement Zone is holding four free information sessions in March and April on things downtown retailers can do to promote their businesses and improve visibility. The first, held last Wednesday, was on the benefits of having an outdoor patio. Here are the next sessions:

March 13: Inspired window displays. 8:30 a.m. to 10 a.m., 387 Graham Ave.

April 3: Creating a web presence. 2 p.m. to 4 p.m, Room 3B54, University of Winnipeg's Buhler Centre, 460 Portage Ave.

April 10: Getting 'hype' with social media. 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. U of W's Buhler Centre.

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/business/patios-popping-up-downtown-142290325.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.