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# Downtown dining menu grows

## New restaurants keep popping up

By: Murray McNeill / Commercial Real Estate

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*Edgar Rascon and Aline Tezcucano are opening La Bamba Cafe and Lounge at 285 Portage Ave. (below) in early to mid-February. (PHOTOS BY JOE BRYKSA / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS)*


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### Latest openings

Another vacant Portage Avenue storefront is getting a new lease on life.

The owners of La Bamba Restaurant in Osborne Village are opening a La Bamba Café & Lounge in the former Manhattan Bistro at 285 Portage Ave.

The spot has been home to a number of restaurants over the years, including the original Mirlycourtois and Lindy's, but had been vacant since the Manhattan closed last year.

La Bamba co-owner Edgar Rascon said in an interview that renovations are already well underway. He and his business partners, Aline Tezcucano and Juan Godinez, hope to open the 80-seat outlet in early to mid-February.

"We think the Portage Avenue location is going to be very good for us," Rascon said.

La Bamba is one of at least 20 new restaurants or lounges that have opened or announced plans to open in the downtown in the past year. They range from stand-alone restaurants to smaller outlets in the downtown shopping-mall food courts.

The list includes two others that have opened in previously vacant Portage Avenue storefronts. One is a Mediterranean-style bistro and lounge, Arkadash Bistro and Lounge, that will open later this winter in the former Chocolate Shop at 268 Portage, and the other is the Juss Jazz lounge, which opened in the former Soup Pierre location near Portage and Fort Street.

Brian Timmerman, executive director of the Exchange District Business Improvement Zone (BIZ), said although restaurants are always coming and going, the pace of new arrivals has been escalating in the past year.

Here are some of the new restaurants and lounges that have opened or announced plans to open downtown within the last year or so:

- Smoke's Poutinerie, 131 Albert St.
- Brooklynn's Bistro, 177 Lombard Ave.
- Boa Lounge, 177 Lombard Ave.
- Bodegoes (formerly The Line Up ), 98 Albert St.
- Winnipeg Free Press News Cafe, 237 McDermot Ave.
- Parlour Coffee, 468 Main St. -- Opera Ultralounge, 441 Main St.
- Fox & Fiddle, 456 Main St.
- Green Leaf Health Café, 247 Edmonton St.
- Tim Hortons, Richardson Centre Concourse
- Fresh Fridge, Shops of Winnipeg Square
- Stella's Café, 460 Portage Ave. (Buhler Centre)
- Spuds Poutinerie Concession Stand, MTS Centre
- Fergies Fish 'N Chips, 2nd Floor, 393 Portage Ave. (Portage Place Shopping Centre)
- Bombay Tandoori Chicken, Pizza & More, 331 Hargrave St.
- Chef Express of India, Portage Place
- Juss Jazz, 240 Portage Ave.
- Rudy's Eat & Drink, 375 Graham Ave. (Manitoba Hydro Building)
- Arkadash Bistro and Lounge, 268 Portage Ave.
- Dhoom Restaurant & Lounge, 141 Donald St.

-- sources: The Exchange District Business Improvement Zone and the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ.

Timmerman attributed the increase to the string of new residential and office developments springing up downtown, including the apartment and condominium developments in the Exchange, and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, United Way of Winnipeg, and Sports Manitoba office developments in the Main Street area.

"This revitalization is bringing all these new users (of retail products and services) to the area that weren't there a few years ago," Timmerman said. "And I think business owners are starting to realize there is a new vibrancy, and that stuff is beginning to happen in the downtown and in the Exchange, and that's when people start to invest in it. They see it's all starting to come together."

Stefano Grande, executive director of the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ, said the arrival of more restaurants is particularly encouraging.

"Restaurants attract people during the day and during the evenings and on the weekends," Grande said. "So the more restaurants that open up, the closer you are to achieving that goal of creating a vibrant downtown..."

Because restaurants help draw more people to an area, that also helps attract other types of retailers, he and Timmerman said.

Timmerman rattled off the names of a number of other types of retailers that have opened in the Exchange in the past year, including a new furniture store (HutK) and a new designer shoe store (Jose and Markam) on Princess Street, and a vintage clothing store (Rhymes with Orange) on McDermot Avenue.

Rascon confirmed the growing number of new downtown developments was what drew him and his partners to the area.

"I think it's the new area to be in."

He said he's aware some Winnipeggers don't feel safe coming downtown in the evenings and on weekends.

"But I think that's changing. With the Avenue Building (residential development) and all of the new restaurants going

in there... I think in the next five years, it's going to be a lot different."

He said they signed a five-year lease with an option to extend it an additional five years, "so we're in this for the long haul."

Rascon said they also wanted to make their move now, before rising demand for restaurant and lounge space drives up rental rates.

Kris Mutcher, a retail leasing specialist with the Winnipeg office of Colliers International, said rates are "all over the map" at the moment, depending on the age of the buildings and where they are in the downtown.

He said although rates have been holding steady so far, they're expected to start climbing over the next couple of years as the amount of vacant retail space declines.

"There is not a glut of restaurant space sitting out there," he said.

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 email address below, or at 697-7254.

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