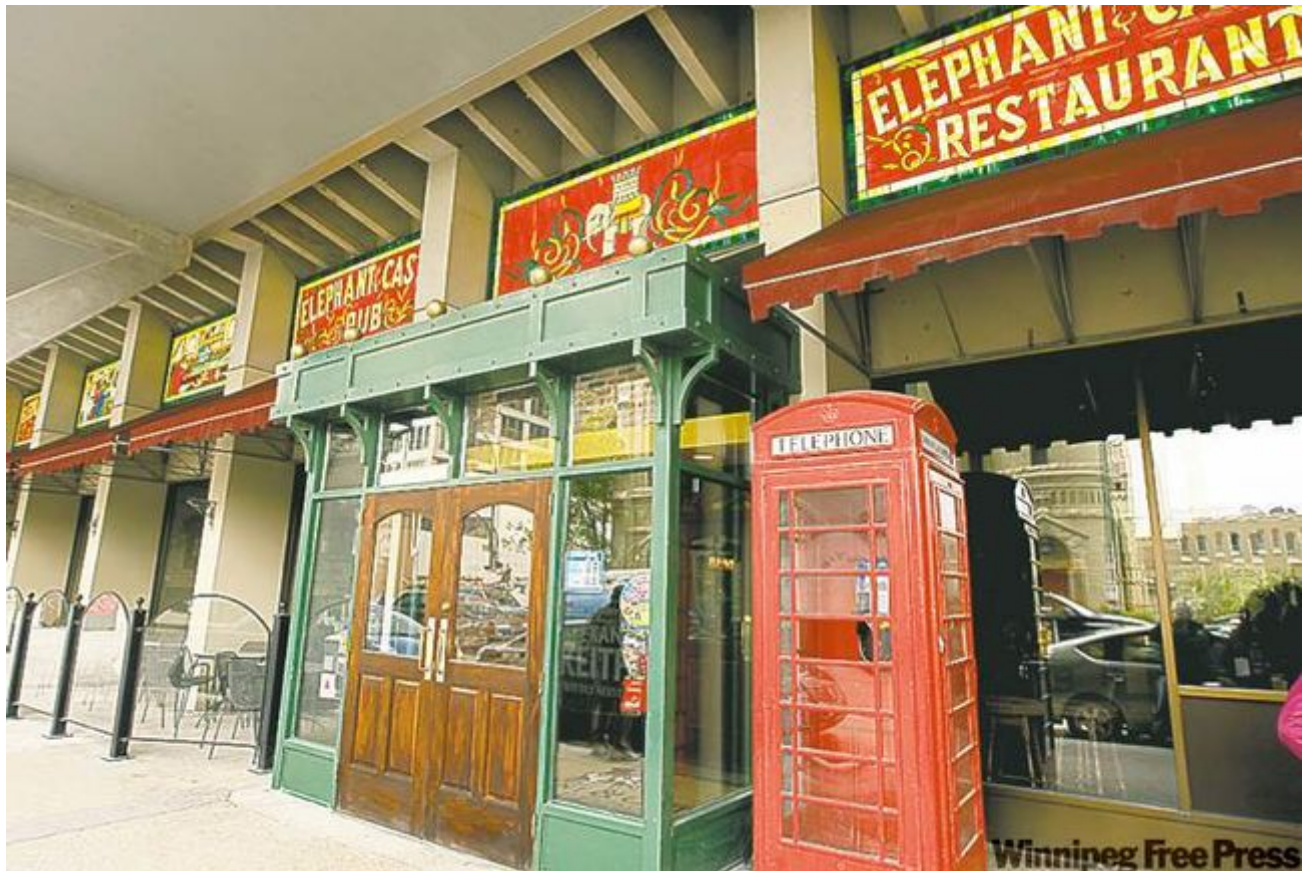


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Original Joe's, Elephant & Castle expanding

By: Murray McNeill

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KEN GIGLIOTTI / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS ARCHIVES [Enlarge Image](#)

The Elephant & Castle on St. Mary Avenue is the chain's only outlet in Winnipeg.

THE Alberta owner of two prominent restaurant chains -- Original Joe's and the Elephant & Castle Pub and Restaurant -- says it wants to beef up its presence in Winnipeg.

The FranWorks Group of Companies plans to open several more Original Joe's and Elephant & Castle outlets in the city, company founder and CEO Derek Doke said in an interview.

How soon and how many will depend on the availability of sites, Doke said.

He also said that within the next two weeks, the company will be introducing a third restaurant chain to the city. He wouldn't reveal the name, but said it's similar to Original Joe's and has the same menu. The first will be located in Kildonan Place Shopping Centre.

Doke said the reason for the different name is FranWorks plans to expand the Original Joe's concept into Eastern Canada. But there are already restaurant chains there with "Joe" in their names. So to avoid confusion, FranWorks will go with a different name in that part of the country.

Doke was commenting after FranWorks announced a U.S. bankruptcy court has approved its purchase of Boston-based Elephant & Castle Group Inc. for \$22.75 million.

The U.S. company owned and operated nine outlets in Canada and 10 in the United States. It filed for bankruptcy protection last year from its U.S. creditors. It was subsequently put up for sale and FranWorks bid for it.

Although some thought it might convert the Elephant & Castle outlets to Original Joe's, Doke said that's not the case.

"Elephant & Castle has been in the industry for more than 30 years and has a great reputation among its customers. We look forward to applying our expertise to continue to establish their long-standing brand."

He also said the company intends to grow the chain on both sides of the border, and Winnipeg is an important part of those plans.

"Winnipeg has been a good market for us so far with our Original Joe's," he said, noting its outlet at Grant Avenue and Kenaston Boulevard has done well since opening less than two years ago. That's why it already has a second outlet in the works in a new retail centre to be built this year on St. Mary's Road, across from St. Vital Shopping Centre.

There's only one Elephant & Castle in the city, located on the main floor of the downtown Delta Winnipeg hotel. Doke said FranWorks is thrilled to have a restaurant in the heart of the downtown.

He noted the outlet is within shouting distance of both the MTS Centre and the Winnipeg Convention Centre. And with the return of NHL hockey and the city's plans to expand the convention centre, "both of those venues will serve us well in the future."

He said FranWorks intends to retain all 900 Elephant & Castle employees, including the approximately 40 in Winnipeg.

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