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# Winnipeg gets a taste of carnival

## Waterfront condo complex secures Brazilian steak house as key tenant

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*WAYNE GLOWACKI / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS Noel Bernier plans to open a new Brazilian steak house and a smaller restaurant/lounge on the first and second floors of the Excelsior at the corner of Waterfront Drive and Bannatyne Avenue.*

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After five long years, the owner of the Excelsior condominium complex on Waterfront Drive has finally

landed a major restaurant tenant for its building.

Sherwood Developments Ltd. president Fausto Pereira has confirmed the owner of Hermanos Steakhouse & Wine Bar will be opening the city's first Brazilian steak house -- Carnival Brazilian BBQ -- and a smaller restaurant/lounge in the Excelsior later this year.

Both will be located in the two-storey annex on the northwest corner of Waterfront Drive and Bannatyne Avenue, with Carnival on the second floor and the restaurant/lounge and a kitchen on the main floor.

"For a while it looked like nothing was going to happen," an ecstatic-sounding Pereira said of the lengthy search for a restaurant tenant, noting they even considered leasing the 6,000 square feet of vacant space to an office tenant when no restaurant operators seemed to be interested in it.

Now he's glad they didn't, because a steak house and lounge will bring people to the area during evenings and on the weekends, as well as during the day.

"And that kind of vibrancy is what everybody envisioned (for the area)."

Pereira said Waterfront Drive and the East Exchange seem to have turned the corner in the last year or so.

"There is so much activity now in the East Exchange District and on Waterfront Drive and Market Avenue," he said, referring to a number of new apartment and condominium developments recently completed, underway or in the works.

He said it's helping to establish the critical mass of full-time residents needed to attract new retailers and visitors to the area.

"You just see so many more people walking around there now. It's a huge difference from last year to this year."

Pereira is also optimistic adding an exciting new restaurant concept like a Brazilian steak house will give retailers and shoppers even more reason to come to the East Exchange.

There are still two other vacant retail/commercial spaces in the Excelsior. One is about 1,200 square feet with an outdoor patio, and would be ideal for a café or a deli, Pereira said. The other is 600 square feet and could serve as a small office.

Although these spaces have also been empty for five years, "I think they will fill up quickly now," he said.

Carnival Brazilian BBQ will be Hermanos' owner Noel Bernier's third eatery in the East Exchange District. Last month, he also opened Corrientes Argentine Pizzeria just down the street from Hermanos, at 137 Bannatyne Ave.

And he's not done yet. Bernier said he and the owner of Winnipeg's Café Dario also hope to open a new Café Dario outlet next year in a vacant space next door to Hermanos, which is at 179 Bannatyne Ave.

The city has already given them the green light, he said, but they want to see how the public responds to the Carnival concept before making a final decision.

"We both agree it's an exciting possibility and we both believe it should happen. But at this point, we're still walking down that road."

Bernier is an unabashed booster of the East Exchange District and Waterfront Drive, describing it as one of the most beautiful neighbourhoods in the country.

"You've got the old and the new right beside each other and it represents everything about our future."

And Bernier doesn't just talk the talk. Not only are all three of his restaurants located there, he also recently moved into a condo on Waterfront Drive.

He said his mission is to help solidify Bannatyne Avenue and the East Exchange as one of the city's restaurant hot spots.

When Carnival opens in November or December, there will be at least six "quality" restaurants on Bannatyne between King Street and Waterfront Drive, Bernie said. A Café Dario location would make seven and he'd like to see even more.

"It's important to have that vibrancy. It's what this area needs."

Bernier said it's taken him nearly four years to lay the groundwork for the opening of the city's first Brazilian steak house restaurant. Not only did he visit Brazil to learn everything he could about the concept, which he describes as one of the fastest growing in North America, he purchased all of the specialized kitchen equipment from there. He also sent the head chef and other key personnel there for training in an authentic Brazilian barbecue steak house.

To create added interest, he plans to have the kitchen facing onto the traffic circle at Bannatyne and Waterfront so passing vehicles and pedestrians can see the staff barbecuing the 15 different cuts of meat that will be served in the all-you-can-eat steak house.

Carnival isn't the only new restaurant coming to Waterfront Drive. Construction is already underway on the new Sunstone Boutique Hotels development further north at the former Alexander Docks/harbour master site.

The \$11-million development will include a three-storey, 67-room boutique hotel on what was a gravel parking lot, and a casual-dining restaurant in the one-storey former harbour master's building.

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