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Carbone fuels culinary excitement

Restaurant, which bakes with coal, set to open new location downtown

By: **Murray McNeill**Posted: **1:00 AM** | Comments: **0g**

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Carbone co-owners Daniel Simon (left) and Benjamin Nasberg are thrilled to be opening a downtown location. They will add to their Taylor Avenue outlet by opening a new restaurant on 260 St. Mary Ave. (below). (JESSICA BURTNICK / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS)



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The new 2,500-square-foot, 100-seat Carbone restaurant/lounge will also have

Add a coal-fired pizza restaurant to the growing list of new eateries sprouting up in the downtown.

The local owners of the nearly two-year-old Carbone (pronounced kar-bone-eh) restaurant on Taylor Avenue, which bills itself as the first coal-fired pizza restaurant in Canada, plan to open a 2,500-square-foot, 100-seat Carbone restaurant/lounge this fall on the main floor of the Stevenson Group building at 260 St. Mary Ave. It will be their second in the city and will also have an outdoor patio area.

Daniel Simon said he and his partners -- Benjamin Nasberg, Joseph Paletta, and Sean Dollinger -- are thrilled to be adding a downtown location.

"It's going to be an awesome spot because the downtown is being revived," Simon said in an interview. "And we have a couple of new concepts we'll be bringing to Winnipeg... for the lounge and restaurant."

A spokesman for the Stevenson Group, which is owned by Winnipeg's Chipman family, said Stevenson officials are equally thrilled to have a restaurant tenant for one of the building's two vacant main-floor units.

"And it (Carbone) is an exciting concept..." said Scott Stephanson, president of the Stevenson Group's development arm -- Longboat Development Corporation.

Carbone bakes its pizzas, paninis and other signature dishes in 850-degree anthracite coal-burning ovens. Simon said anthracite coal is one of the world's oldest and cleanest-burning fossil fuels, and baking food in that kind of oven brings out the flavours of the ingredients.

Stephanson said he's eaten at the Taylor Avenue restaurant

*an outdoor patio area. (BORIS
MINKEVICH / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS)*

and is a big fan of the food.

He said talks also have been held with a number of potential tenants for the other 1,500-square-foot unit on the main floor.

"We'd love to get a coffee shop in there, but we want it to be somebody with a decent concept and some staying power," he said. "It (a deal) should happen in 2013, for sure."

The Stevenson Group's three-storey, 30,000-square-foot office building, which is on the southwest corner of St. Mary and Garry Street, is one of three buildings the company now owns in the area. The others are a split-level brick building on the southeast corner of St. Mary and Smith Street, which used to be a Royal Canadian Legion, and a one-storey, former radiator shop on Garry immediately south of the surface-parking lot behind 260 St Mary.

Stephanson said both buildings are "old and tired" and likely will be demolished. But not until Longboat decides how it's going to redevelop the two properties.

He said they hope to make a decision on the former legion property within the next six months. The possibilities include a multi-family residential building, a commercial building (office/retail), or a combined residential/commercial complex.

"We're talking to the city about redevelopment plans for it. The market is going to dictate any new development downtown. But if it is residential, we'd be happy to support more multi-family residential development in the downtown."

Stephanson said the replacement building on Garry Street will likely include a parking component. But a decision on that is likely a few years away.

He said whatever Longboat builds on the former legion site will likely include a tenant or tenants that provide some type of service the police-station employees would use.

"That is such a huge development and we want to make sure (our project) is complimentary to it and complimentary to the city's vision for downtown redevelopment."

Simon said the prospect of having the new police headquarters across the street -- it's expected to open in early 2014 -- is one of the reasons they chose that site.

"It was one of the deciding factors because of the safety aspect... and because that's a lot of people to have right across the street," he explained. "We also love that it's close, but not too close, to the MTS Centre, and that there are businesses right above us, too (in the Stevenson Group building)."

He said they've also been promised some parking spaces in the two surface lots behind the building.

The executive director of the Downtown Winnipeg Business Improvement Zone said Carbone will be a welcome new addition to the downtown.

Stefano Grande said at least 15 new restaurants have opened in the BIZ's area, which doesn't include the Exchange District, since the start of 2011. And at least four more are in the pipeline.

"We're seeing an influx of pubs and restaurants that are setting up shop in the downtown," he said, "and we'd like to see even more."

Grande said it's still difficult to find a table at many downtown restaurants on the day of a Winnipeg Jets hockey game, "and we know that crowd is not going to go away."

And several major new office and residential developments in the works for the downtown will bring

several thousand more potential customers to the area over the next few years, he added.

"So it's not just about the Jets traffic anymore. It's about all of the office and residential (traffic) too."

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