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Pizzeria owner to open eatery in new downtown hotel

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Bobby Mottola plans to offer the best of street food from exotic locales.

A local restaurateur has landed what is surely one of the most sought-after locations in town.

Bobby Mottola, owner and face of Pizzeria Gusto in River Heights, has confirmed he and a group of

investors have landed the lease for a 4,000-square-foot space in the lobby of the Alt Hotel being built across the street from the MTS Centre.

The opening of both the hotel and restaurant is still about 11/2 years away, but Mottola's plans are nearing completion. The name is still up for debate but the street food-oriented concept isn't.

"We're going to take the best of the street food from the hot zones, like the taco carts in Mexico and sandwiches from Cuba, all the things you can get walking down the street (in tropical countries)," he said.

The setting will be upscale, with a "clever" bar list featuring tequila and sake from all over the world as well as some Central American wines.

"It's going to be very true to the regions and cultures that are going to be represented," he said.

Mottola could have been content simply running Pizzeria Gusto on Academy Road, but he felt the timing of adding a downtown location was right.

"I think the people involved in the development of downtown, at Longboat (Development Corp.), True North, Milestones (restaurant) as well as the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the convention centre and the Alt hotel, are putting the right pieces in place," he said.

In addition to more than 40 Jets games per year, Mottola said he is also looking forward to traffic from other MTS Centre events plus hotel guests in more than 150 rooms.

"We'll be doing their business room catering through the restaurant," he said.

Another eatery, Ontario-based Milestones Grill and Bar, is going to set up on the hotel's main floor, too.

The Alt hotel is one of the centrepieces of the Sports, Hospitality and Entertainment District (SHED), a more than \$600-million project designed to revitalize 11 blocks of downtown Winnipeg that include the Winnipeg Convention Centre and the Metropolitan and Burton Cummings theatres.

Scott Stephanson, president of Longboat, co-developer of the hotel site, said Mottola's proposal was the best of the 10 he received from national chains and local restaurateurs in response to its request for proposals.

"We love the idea of a local flavour," he said. "The concept presented to us was tremendous and (Mottola) had a very well thought out business plan and menu."

He said a number of people at Longboat were already longtime fans of Pizzeria Gusto.

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