

ALL THE NEWS THAT'S FIT TO EAT

Everything's Coming Up Restaurants

BY MARISA MARSEY

SO MANY FLOWERS have already bloomed thanks to an unseasonably warm winter, but at least we'll be able to watch lots of restaurants open up this spring. Here's a sampling.



Bobby Huber in his old location.

BOBBYWOOD MAKES A COMEBACK

"New American with Old World influences," is how Bobby Huber describes his cooking as he readies Bobbywood for a late April debut in the former Smith & Welton warehouse at 435 Monticello Avenue in downtown Norfolk. Seating 140, the new restaurant will be a blend of classic and contemporary, with the flash and color you'd expect from a chef-owner ballsy enough to perpetuate the name Bobbywood, his Wards Corner award-winner from 1995 to 2003.

The menu, scripted in discipline-grounded daring, is big in size and scope, with room

enough for both caviar and black-eyed peas, old favorites such as étouffée and pot stickers, and intensely flavored pork chops, duck, filet mignon, vegan selections, and a whole new category called "Spoons." They're tiny starters, more than an amuse, less than an app; leek fondue with corn maque choux (\$1.50) among them. The wine list will be big, too, with a 1,500-bottle capacity, glass-enclosed, temperature-controlled cellar. City lot (free after 5 p.m. unless a special event night) and valet parking will be available. Stay tuned at www.eatbobbywood.com.

VINTAGE TAVERN: BUILT TO SPEC-TACULAR

Taste meets real estate at the upscale eatery in the midst of burgeoning Governor's Pointe, a 141-home development and retail center near Smithfield Gardens on Route 17 in northern Suffolk. Vintage, opening this week, looks like a new *olde* English hunting lodge where every custom detail delights.

"It's so much fun having a partner who's a builder," Cindy McGann says of Quality Homes' Brian Mullins, a Governor's Pointe developer. She and spouse Sam McGann, also chef-co-owner of The Blue Point in Duck, N.C. (reopening at the end of May in a still laidback yet expanded form), teamed with Mullins and his wife Teresa after Meredith Nicolls had to postpone involvement in the project following a mountain bike accident (see Fundraiser). "I said

I needed a hostess stand and—there it was," she points to the rich wood podium. Ledge stone exteriors, pegged-plank floors, wood beams, wrought iron accents, and a copper-trimmed open kitchen will have traditional home designers cribbing ideas.

Mullins is also an avid bow hunter. Those are his elk, fallow deer, and caribou trophies mounted in the congenial tavern room. The 76-seat main dining area, with a stunning stone fireplace, leads to a lakeside patio with fire pit and waterfalls. Sigh.

Sam McGann's seasonally Southern cuisine reflects the same care and craftsmanship as Mullins's work. A menu preview reveals pulled smoked duck with cheddar cheese grits, griddled fired rockfish cakes with Carolina red rice and green herb sauce, and for dessert, warm Granny Smith apple cobbler with nutmeg ice cream.

As if the name Vintage (no relation to Vintage Kitchen in Norfolk) and Cindy McGann's position as Chesapeake Bay Wine Classic executive director weren't enough to signal the weight wine carries here, check out the 1,300 bottle wine cellar with 10 private lockers (half are already spoken for), original artwork by Arvid (the renowned painter of wine and its milieu), Riedel stemware, and a wine list featuring Bordeaux back to the 60s and a vertical of every Opus ever produced.

Vintage Tavern is located at 1900 Governor's

Pointe Drive, Suffolk. Tel. No. 238-8808. Tues.-Sat. from 5 p.m., Sunday supper from 4 to 8 p.m.

FROM WILD MONKEY TO...?

After weeks of buzz on Colley Avenue about what's going to take Wild Monkey's place, local club owner Annette Stone signed papers for the Ghent eatery last Monday and tapped Sara Woodmansee, Sydney Meers's protégé and chef at Cowboy Syd's in Port Warwick, Newport News, for executive chef.

"Three people stopped us as we came out today bombarding us with questions," says Woodmansee. "When are you opening? You're not going to be hoity toity are you?"

To wit, they're aiming for a late April opening and no, not hoity toity. But different.

"I've learned a lot from Syd [Meers]. Doing comfort food but with my own style," explains Woodmansee. "I'd like the menu to be flexible so I can do some Asian and other things sometimes." Causal-fine-comfort-fusion, if you will. "I have a weakness, a passion for cheese," she also admits. "I know more than I probably should about it."

So perhaps a cheese cart—but it's too early to tell. They still have to come up with a name. Woodmansee always thought her first restaurant would be called Capers because she loves them, too, but that's already been rejected. Too costume shop, they decided.

NEW STEAKHOUSE DOWNTOWN

Sture Sigfred and Ronald Zoby of 456 Fish hope to make another big splash when they open a second downtown Norfolk restaurant, Byrd & Baldwin Bros. Steakhouse, at

Sara Woodmansee promises no new hoity-toity on Colley Ave.



PHOTO BY KATHY KEENEY

It's illegal to go to Havana...

...but it's FUN!

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