

The Dive Bar offers more than name would suggest

Downtown Development Fund money was used by owner Mike West to open the bar

By Steven Neuman
Freelance Reporter

The term "dive bar" conjures images of sticky floors, small bathrooms, poor lighting, cheap beer and stale peanuts. But that description is a far cry from The Dive Bar & Grill, Eugene's newest restaurant, which features in-house microbrews, comfort food with a gourmet twist, a video game lounge and eye-popping art based on The Beatles' "Yellow Submarine" animated film.

The city took another step toward revitalizing downtown when local entrepreneur Mike West unveiled his newest venture, located at 844 Olive St., Jan. 29. The Dive was financed in part by a \$75,000 loan from the Eugene Downtown Development Fund, a program that provides financial aid to local businesses in an effort to redevelop downtown.

Mayor Jim Torrey, who has witnessed a push for downtown redevelopment during his tenure, spoke about downtown businesses at the grand opening gala.

"We do have to get people to come back down into downtown Eugene. We do have to support the people who are taking a step of courage to open businesses," Torrey said. "Make it a point when you've got a choice and you don't know for sure. Should I go there? Should I go here? Come here. Do it because we want to support them, but do it because this is a great place to be in downtown."

West is the president of MW Kitchens Inc. His company also owns West Bros. River Ranch, 3 Square Bar & Cafe and Mona Lizza Ristorante & Bar, which is located directly next to The Dive. Echoing Torrey's sentiments, West said The Dive is a new experiment in downtown business.

"I'm wildly excited about it. Late-night traffic is something historically that my company hasn't generated a lot of," he said. "We've been in the dinner

business so this is going to be a real digression. At my age doing new things is rare, and we're going to be doing a lot of new things."

The Dive, which is open to minors until 9 p.m., features a sizable and affordable menu with snacks, entrees, burgers, sandwiches and soups — all under \$7.50. The fully stocked bar features domestic and imported beers in addition to the restaurant's own brews. The restaurant also boasts pool tables, wireless Internet access and space for live shows featuring local bands.

The basement lounge features a separate bar and six interconnected Xbox consoles wired for live Internet play in front of overstuffed couches. Customers

from watching what was happening in the neighborhood," he said.

"We were getting a lot more people coming off campus. I helped build Rennie's, so I don't want everybody to stop going to Rennie's, but I'd love to see them down here a little bit," West said.

When West came to Eugene in 1972, he said the downtown district was "radically different."

Amara Sena, a Lane Community College student, said she's noticed a change in the Broadway area.

"Downtown has come a long way from what it used to be. Just a few years ago, I wouldn't have even wanted to walk down here," she said. "But now that the streets are opened up



Tim Bobosky Photographer

(Left to right) Head brewer Chip Harey, owner Mike West and woodworker Alan Oster celebrate the opening of The Dive Bar and Grill, downtown's newest venue.

over 21 can play for \$5 per controller per hour. West plans to hold video game tournaments in the near future.

Assistant brewer Todd M. Friedman, who is also a junior anthropology major at the University, said he was excited about The Dive's innovations.

"It has the potential to be something completely new and unique," he said. "It has an individual sense."

West was enthusiastic about bringing in student patrons.

"The concept of The Dive evolved

and the library is more functional, it's just added to it, reinforced it, made it a lot better."

Ward 3 City Councilor David Kelly, who represents the University area, also attended the grand opening.

"Downtown is, and ought to be, the heart of the city," he said. "It ought to be the one neighborhood where everybody can feel at home in, when they go out that that's the place to go."

Steven Neuman is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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