

Restaurant Row

Three new restaurants move in on Pearl Street.

By the end of the holiday season, we'll have more opportunities to raise our glasses and our forks as downtown Pearl Street welcomes three new restaurants: Mezza Luna Pizzeria, Sweet Basil Thai Cuisine and DISH Comfort Cuisine at the Downtown Lounge.

With Café Xenon, Ambrosia, and Adam's Place as strong anchors, the addition of these three new restaurants helps elevate the two-block radius around Pearl and Broadway to the status of a new "restaurant row." Sandy Little from Mezza Luna calls it "Eugene's own Pearl District," comparing it to Portland's burgeoning art and restaurant center with the same title.

Little and business partner John Fitzgerald dreamt up Mezza Luna after meeting at a pizza parlor in Portland. Fitzgerald, one of the founders of Portland's Bella Faccia Pizzeria, describes Mezza Luna's fare as New York/New Jersey style pizza with a gourmet flair.

The forthcoming pizza eatery, located at the base of the Eugene Hotel building, boasts as many vegetarian and vegan toppings as meat selections. With a beer and wine bar, pizza aficionados can expect to enjoy a pizza slice with toppings such as cashew spread, roasted red and yellow pepper and marinated

tempeh, along with a pint of Pabst, for around \$5. Fitzgerald and Little plan to stay open until midnight on weekends, hoping to catch the late-night crowd coming home from art and music events.

Mezza Luna, along with Sweet Basil next

wall. Paths of turquoise blue colored floor paneling dip and dash around the dining area, adding to the floating market illusion. "It's like you're coasting through water," Stabin said.

Already an established name with two restaurants in Portland, Sweet Basil is famous for its classy yet traditional presentation of Thai cuisine. Another partner, Kuraya Chulacharit, founder of Kuraya's Thai restau-

opening. James used his wine expertise to perfectly pair wines with certain dishes, "something many Thai restaurants fail to do," Stabin said.

Sweet Basil will also feature a full service bar and will be open until 2 am on weekends.

Just an alleyway away, Mark Stern extends the home-cooked fare of his well-known Carte Blanche soup cart to **DISH**

Comfort Cuisine, a full-scale restaurant inside the Downtown Lounge. Stern hopes that offering hearty foods that feed the soul as well as the body will evoke memories of family and friends.

Stern's grandmother is the influence behind his recipe for matzo ball soup. Other DISH offerings will include a slow-cooked pot roast and grilled pork chops. Stern also plans to feature an extensive a la carte menu with an array of veggies and side dishes.

"Our focus is on service, quality, nice preparation and balanced eating," he said.

To better accommodate the restaurant, the dining area of the Downtown Lounge will undergo a facelift, with new tables, chairs and partitions, giving it a softer, more intimate feel. Once the restaurant makes its grand opening in January, it will offer lunch, dinner, happy hour and late night menus.

Mezza Luna (933 Pearl) Sweet Basil (949 Pearl) and DISH Comfort Cuisine (959 Pearl) are all slated to open in early January. **EW**



Stern: DISH Comfort Cuisine



Fitzgerald and Little: Mezza Luna



Stabin: Sweet Basil

door, both occupy spaces originally designed for retail on the 900 Pearl Street block. Once cramped, dingy consignment shops, both restaurants now feature exposed, 13-foot ceilings, skylights, counter seating areas and a vast kitchen.

Max Stabin, one of the partners behind Sweet Basil and co-owner of the Campus Inn, estimates that his new Eugene restaurant will seat more than 80 people. The restaurant's aesthetic revolves around a giant mural of Bangkok's floating market on its north

rant in Springfield, created most of Sweet Basil's dishes. She says the restaurant's focus is on the more elegant side of Thai food. Her menu includes deep-fried trout with cashew nuts, and apple, papaya and mango chutney, as well as traditional selections such as Sweet Basil's signature curry, a red curry peanut sauce with bell pepper, carrots and broccoli.

A diverse wine list, created by Broadway Market co-owner Angus James, adds to Sweet Basil's highly anticipated Eugene

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