

Jeff Fields (left) and Bill Teriele of The 'Wich House



TODD COOPER

Leap of Faith

New downtown businesses find success among empty storefronts

In an era of politically charged uncertainty surrounding the destiny of Eugene's downtown, the choice to launch a new business in what appears to be a Bermuda triangle of capitalism might seem insanely risky.

But a handful of local entrepreneurs recently decided to take the plunge and open their doors to a seemingly ambivalent public, demonstrating that "revitalization" can come in smaller packages than the fiscal behemoth proposal represented by recently defeated Measure 20-134. The 'Wich House and The Starlight Lounge are doing their respective parts to bring energy and cash flow to the heart of town, each with a small business strategy designed to forge success in politically, economically and socially sensitive locations.

Jeff Fields and Bill Teriele of The 'Wich House were thrilled when they came across their 8th and Willamette location. They had originally intended to open a catering business, but they decided the high traffic, high visibility storefront was perfectly suited for a sandwich shop and set about designing their own approach to feeding downtown shoppers and employees.

"One of our biggest pet peeves collectively is that everything is prepackaged and preprocessed these days," says Teriele. "We bake our own bread, roast our own meats. We make everything here — the truffles, the cookies, the pies."

Fields explains in that in their efforts to "take sandwiches to the next level," they consider the elements of complete meals and combine them between two pieces of bread (white, wheat, or herb focaccia). The Steakhouse 'Wich, for example, is an entire steak dinner in a handheld package, containing filet mignon, port wine roasted grapes, bleu cheese and sweet greens. Pot roast, turkey and gravy

and pork chops with apple sauce get the same treatment, while vegetarians can drool over the Poached Pear 'Wich, adorned with brie cheese and candied walnuts. They also serve homemade soups, fresh salads, beer and wine.

Fields and Teriele worked as a biochemist and a horse trainer respectively in their earlier lives, and came by their foodie skills under radically different circumstances. Fields' grandfather taught him the art of baking while Teriele was classically trained at the Culinary Institute of America and has been in the restaurant business since the age of 15. "Our strengths compliment each other's weaknesses," they say. Neither feels overly concerned about the purported curse of downtown.

"We like the location a lot," Teriele says. "Our friends have lived here their whole lives, and they want downtown to be better. I've been to every state, and you see the same strip malls everywhere, and it just tears me up. But there are great, creative people and great downtowns all across the country. It

just takes a little re-education." Teriele and Fields say they would like to see more shopping or possibly a movie theater in their neck of the woods.

Jo Dee Moine has been putting her time and energy into the downtown area for years as the owner of Luckey's (bar, pool hall, music venue, former cigar club). "When I first moved downtown, it was like a ghost town," she says. "It was not a pretty picture. Now it has changed dramatically. You see mini traffic jams."

Noting the consistent success of her own establishment as well as a handful of other bars located in the cross section of Olive and Broadway, Moine decided to open The Starlight Lounge as an upscale compliment to the pool and rock 'n' roll atmosphere of Luckey's. While the Starlight immediately generated buzz by offering selections of Ninkasi and shots of Patron for a dollar, Moine feels it is the specialty cocktails and local focus that ultimately keep patrons coming back.

"We have about 20 distilled spirits, all made in Oregon. The next trend in the alcohol industry is craft distilleries. We have one that is flavored with Doug fir." In addition to specialty booze, The Starlight also buys local produce when possible, utilizing the nearby farmer's market and mixing with high quality, fresh squeezed fruit juice. The dramatic décor, attentive staff and delicious libations have all added up to early success for The Starlight.

"We've just seen it grow really fast," Moine says. "It's been a lot busier than we thought, and we've gotten a lot of compliments."

What about the risk of opening a business in such a contested area? Moine says she feels downtown is already hitting its stride.

"Whether it is improved through condos and retail or whether it stays the same, there is a lot of interest in downtown.

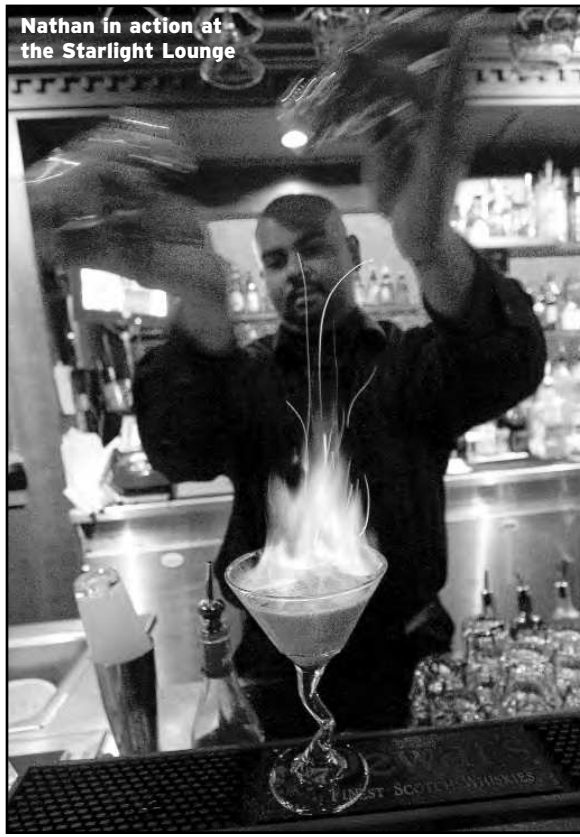
We feel really positive about being downtown. I see a lot of smaller projects moving forward. Downtown isn't as bad as they like to portray it in the media. I'm downtown every day, and it isn't perfect, but there is a lot going on."

Moine says that the recent arrival of Davis' restaurant has been a good thing for her neighborhood and she would like to see other high-end establishments become her neighbors.

"More restaurants, everyone wants to see more housing. Some more boutiques and retail would be good," she says. "I want to see Josh [Keim, owner of Lucky Noodle and Ring of Fire] put a restaurant on Broadway."

EW

Nathan in action at the Starlight Lounge



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The Starlight Lounge, 830 Olive St.

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