

ANGELS IN THE RYE

New restaurant brings bit of Old World elegance BY SARAH DECKER

Times are tough for opening up a new restaurant, a fact known all too well by Wendy Watson, Jeffrey Passerotti and Kiyallah Heatherstone, the owners of Rye, one of Eugene's newest bistros.

"There's just no bank money available to restaurants, period," says Passerotti.

That little fact didn't stop this trio of longtime friends and restaurant lifers from realizing their dreams. They opened shop without taking a dime from the bank or any city funding. Instead, the group used their own money supplemented by private donations from a group they like to call their "angels."

aspect of the menu, however, is that no entrée item costs more than \$20. And the selection of drinks — from pre- to post-prohibition cocktails, as well as beer and wine — is likewise moderately priced, not to mention paired beautifully with the menu's offerings.

"You cook with wine, you cook with the alcohols and the vermouth behind the bar," Passerotti says. "It's all integrated."

The three restaurateurs agree that "food and drink" is somewhat a working motto.

"It should be like one word," says Watson, "foodanddrink."

Patrons should feel free to bring their own bottles of wine, seeing as the current selection at Rye is basic, but limited.

"The food that Jeff puts out is fantastic," Heatherstone says. "So bring in some good wine that goes with it. There's nothing like a good glass of wine to go with a great meal."

As the team gets comfortable in their new kitchen, fine tuning what is already a steady flow, they have but one goal: "We're going to stay within the concept of being that little place that you can go and get a good bite of food, a decent drink, hang out and feel comfortable going there," Passerotti says. ■

**"It should be one word —
foodanddrink."**

RYE CO-OWNER WENDY WATSON

And "not those big corporate angels," Watson says. "These are people who have been our customers for years."

The three of them set about putting that money to work by completely revamping the old Bridge location on Franklin Boulevard, doing the renovations and decorating largely on their own. The work they've put in becomes apparent the moment you pass through Rye's iconic doors with their distinctly Eugene accent. Anyone familiar with the building in its prior incarnations is in for a real surprise. The interior has been transformed into a warm, cozy and inviting place.

The furniture was picked up here and there, sometimes from as far away as Portland, yet blends together as if by design. The coppertop tables are at once rugged and elegant. And the collection of prints hanging is an eclectic blend found, literally, Passerotti says, "at Goodwill, St. Vinnie's and our garages."

What was intended to be a mishmash, with a "Grandma's house" feel, ended up being a more refined yet no less homey place.

"We kind of want to sit around and have a drink and hang out, too," Watson says.

The name Rye makes perfect sense when you walk through those doors and see the bar stretched before you. A fine collection of rye whiskey lines the shelf, and whiskey barrels are stacked throughout the space.

The food menu — mostly European influence with some Americana thrown in — is slim, for now. Currently, Rye offers up your hearty, staple winter fare, but all that is set to change soon and, as promised by co-owner and executive chef Passerotti, frequently. One particularly noteworthy



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