

## Roanoke working to attract more restaurants

ROANOKE TRYING TO LURE MORE RESTAURANTS IN HOPES OF ATTRACTING CUSTOMERS, GAINING TAX REVENUE, BOLSTERING REPUTATION AND REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN

Posted on Tue, Jul. 07, 2009

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Special to the Star-Telegram

ROANOKE — A downtown redevelopment in a suburban city of 7,000 residents might seem like small potatoes.

But what Roanoke has on the menu is a three-course plan to revitalize downtown and formalize its reputation as a North Texas dining destination that draws customers and sales tax revenues from nearby — and perhaps not-so-nearby — cities.

Already home to such draws as Classic Cafe and Babe's Chicken Dinner House, the city has for the first time offered cash inducements to attract two more chef-driven restaurants. A seafood restaurant is also in the works and expected to open this month or in early August.

Cowboy Chow and Twisted Root Burger Co. will join Roanoke's already sizable lineup of 39 eateries as the city revamps its quaint, circa-1930s downtown, a redo of Oak Street that includes modern curbs, sidewalks, street lamps, public benches and two traffic roundabouts. The city was also given some marketing cred when it was dubbed the Unique Dining Capital of Texas by an act of the Texas Legislature.

"It's taken us two years to get this far, but when we're done, we'll have an investment, not just for the business community but for the quality of life of our residents and in new city sales tax revenues," Mayor Carl "Scooter" Gierisch said.

### 'Near and dear'

The city already has an unusual history, architecture and tax base. Even with so few residents, it is home to more than 7 million square feet of industrial space and boasts a daytime population of nearly 50,000 workers at warehouses and other facilities in the Alliance Gateway, Ross Perot Jr.'s commercial development on the city's western edge. The value of the tax base is about \$1 billion.

Downtown businesses, though, lost through traffic when the Texas 114 bypass was finished about 11 years ago, soon after the completion of Texas Motor Speedway.

"We decided we needed to have a strategy to bring people back downtown," Gierisch said.

Twisted Root and Cowboy Chow are concepts by chef Jason Boso and others who have acquired solid followings in the Deep Ellum district of Dallas. The Twisted Root concept has already launched a second location in Richardson.

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Roanoke got marketing credibility when it was dubbed the Unique Dining Capital of Texas by an act of the Texas Legislature. STAR-TELEGRAM/MAX FAULKNER



Both are set to open in Oak Street Plaza I at 101 S. Oak St. using, in part, a \$300,000 forgivable loan from the city. The restaurants must keep a combined 40 employees on the site for the next five years.

Developer Justin Springfield and his partner, Chris Gordon, will spend \$1.4 million on the first phase, which includes the property and an 11,000-square-foot space for the two restaurants with a little left over to be leased.

Springfield and Gordon bought the property, discussed their plans with the city and recruited Boso, even taking the mayor and city manager to Deep Ellum to discuss the project and inspect Boso's Dallas operations.

"I went out and found them," Springfield said. "Downtown is near and dear to my heart."

### **Variety of cuisine**

Twisted Root gets its name from the sweet and Idaho potatoes (root vegetables) that it uses for chips. The restaurant, which features a variety of burgers (including buffalo, ostrich and turkey), opened Monday across Oak Street from City Hall.

"I'm hoping that we'll do what the other locations are doing, and that's about 500 customers a day," Boso said last week.

Cowboy Chow offers a smattering of Southwestern and barbecue dishes prepared with a nouveau aesthetic. It is slated to open Sept. 1. On the menu are jalapeño brisket, mashed potato parfait and Indian pizza. The eatery will also feature live music three days a week, a first for Roanoke, Boso said.

Around the corner on U.S. 377, an old office and masonry-supply building is under renovation to house One Fish Two Fish, a 2,700-square-foot casual-dining seafood store to be opened this summer by the folks who own and operate the popular Thai Chili in Southlake. That project is going ahead without the financial inducements offered to the developers of Twisted Root and Cowboy Chow.

### **'The more, the merrier'**

Established businesses are working to maintain access as the \$8.5 million street improvements create a barrier to walk-in traffic and impulse diners.

Chris Wells, an owner of Classic Cafe, and Joel Vinyard, owner of Babe's, say they don't resent the financial help from the city to the new restaurants.

"The more, the merrier," Wells said last week, likening the newcomers to Classic's early tenure in the city 16 years ago.

"We opened and then Babe's opened. So we both kind of fed off of each other. We're very different, but we've complemented each other for different reasons.

"The more choices people have, the more diners an area will attract," Wells said.

City officials approached state Rep. Tan Parker, R-Flower Mound, to support a resolution naming Roanoke the Unique Dining Capital of Texas for its myriad restaurant offerings.

The pronouncement is an additional way to market the city and bring more businesses to Roanoke.