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Eclipse, Gulu-Gulu to join Northampton's restaurant row

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NORTHAMPTON - Two vacant downtown shop fronts will be filled in the coming months by new restaurants.

One called Eclipse will open at 186 Main St., the space formerly occupied by Bistro 186. Toward the other end of Main Street, Cafe Gulu-Gulu is poised to take the place of the former Dynamite Records at 33 Main St.

Both businesses have applied to the city for liquor and entertainment licenses. Eclipse is scheduled to go before the License Commission today; Gulu-Gulu is on the panel's January agenda.

Eclipse's head chef, Northampton native Zach Gorham, said he hopes to open the restaurant around Christmas, depending on the progress of renovations. Applying French cooking techniques to Italian, Indian and Asian dishes, Gorham said he plans to create a new menu daily, using fresh, local ingredients. And every day will feature a different low-cost "comfort food," like meatloaf or fish and chips, he said.

While the emphasis will be on the dinner menu, Gorham said midday customers won't be getting "the typical American lunch." Instead, he'll offer a selection of soups, salads and cured fish.

Gorham is launching Eclipse with financial help from his mother, Jean Weller of Chesterfield. He plans to collaborate on the menu with Donn Boulanger, who will also paint the restaurant inside and out. Emma Donoghue will serve as general manager.

He's also putting a lot of thought into the restaurant's design, with help from Eric Touhey, who is making the table and counter tops, and David Powell, who is creating a combination hardwood-and-tile floor that will include an inlaid eclipse.

"I'm going for kind of a warm, elegant setting," Gorham said.

Gorham said he expects to employ one other chef and four to eight floor staff, "depending on how busy I get."

Previously, Gorham ran the kitchen at Worthington's Tavern Off the Green for two seasons. Earlier he worked at Bread Euphoria in Haydenville and as banquet and sous chef at the Lord Jeffery Inn in Amherst.

Gulu-Gulu owner Steven Feldmann, of Salem, said he plans to open his cafe sometime in late winter or spring.

Feldmann met his wife, Marie Vaskova, at the original Cafe Gulu-Gulu in Prague in 1995. That restaurant closed four years later, but in 2005 the couple revived the name - the French equivalent of "glug-glug" - with a cafe of their own in the eastern Massachusetts city of Lynn. That business later closed, but a second in Salem is still going strong, Feldman said.

The Northampton Gulu-Gulu will be a "pseudo-restaurant," Feldmann said, serving light fare like paninis and salads as well as coffee, wine and beer.

"Basically, we exist to support the local arts," Feldmann said. "Northampton has a very good, strong, vibrant music scene. We're looking to support the unsung heroes."

The cafe will provide space for visual artists to show off their work, and host live music three or four nights a week, he said.

Feldmann's parents, Gerald and Elizabeth Feldmann, live in Belchertown. Stopping in Northampton during visits with them, he said, convinced him and Vaskova that Northampton would be the "perfect place" to expand their business.

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