



The Mirror Business Report



Raleigh Taylor (right) and Fred Kramer, of House Calls, nail wood siding to the renovated building at the corner of East Wayne Street and River Road in Maumee. Gianni's Italian Bistro plans to open at the location in September. MIRROR PHOTO BY SUZETTE VALENTINE



Partners Greg Rufty and David Ball, owners of the former Linck Inn building that will house Gianni's Italian Bistro, stand outside the restaurant under renovation at the corner of River Road and East Wayne Street in Maumee. MIRROR PHOTO BY MIKE MCCARTHY

Gianni's Italian Bistro Ready To Call Uptown Maumee Home

BY KRISTI LEIGH
MIRROR REPORTER

Gianni's Italian Bistro is "moving on up," — to uptown Maumee that is.

The staff of Gianni's Italian Bistro and the Maumee area community are very excited that the oldest commercial building in Lucas County will no longer be vacant. The former Linck Inn will soon have some Italian flair brought in by Greg Rufty, owner of Gianni's Italian Bistro.

Gianni's has been offering fine Italian dining in a semi-formal atmosphere since its inception in late August 2002. A strip center on Dussel Drive housed Gianni's for the past three years.

Rufty has always been a little concerned that his concept for the restaurant was not quite fulfilled by the location.

"Part of my mission statement is 'to provide a dining environment filled with ambience.' Right now, once you walk inside the restaurant, I like to think the ambience of the building is very nice, to where you don't feel like you're in a strip center.

"However, when you walk outside, you're still in a strip center, so now (in the new location) that mission statement will be complete, because as you pull up to this building you see this beautiful, historic building where you'll be drawn to want to come in."

Over the last two years, Rufty had been looking into moving his restaurant. He had looked at parcels of land in Arrowhead Park in Maumee to build a freestanding building and made an offer to purchase the building that formerly housed the

Cooker restaurant in Spring Meadows.

After none of these plans came to fruition, Rufty began discussing the former Linck Inn building with his friend, David Ball.

"David buys, renovates, and then leases out buildings," Rufty said. "So, we just started talking and we both really loved that building on River Road."

In May 2005, Rufty and Ball formed the company Spirits and Liquor Ltd. to purchase and manage real estate, specifically, the former Linck Inn.

Gianni's Italian Bistro will act as a tenant in the building, renting the space from Spirits and Liquor Ltd.

Ball's expertise in renovations and managing the property, and Rufty's expertise in running the restaurant, has made this arrangement work well.

The restoration was not as extensive as one might think, Rufty says. The previous owners did a lot of unseen restoration, such as plumbing, heating and ventilation work, and installing sprinklers throughout the building.

Most of the work Rufty plans to do focuses on making the building handicap accessible and updating the existing décor.

Ball does restorations for a living, making the renovations affordable. First Federal Bank will finance the restorations, which will be covered by the rental payments.

A tax abatement from the city of Maumee may serve as another way to make the move as affordable as possible. Rufty and Ball continue to speak with city officials about acquiring the abatement, although such incen-

tives are usually given to manufacturing businesses, not retail or service jobs.

The city has been good to work with so far though, Rufty said. He added that city officials haven't liked seeing that building vacant.

Plans for the building call for the restaurant to remain on the first floor, featuring a bar area separate from the dining area.

A banquet room accommodating about 100 people is set for the second floor. No plans have been finalized for the third floor yet, other than Rufty would eventually like to utilize it as separate banquet and meeting rooms, but that would take at least a year.

Booking for the banquet room has already begun. Some rehearsal dinners, corporate holiday parties, an art auction fund raiser for Fort Miami Elementary and a ladies' bridge club have all reserved dates.

Rufty said the banquet room offers a great space for all these activities and would also be great for civic group meetings, seminars or even a small wedding.

Many additions to the historic building are in progress, such as an elevator that rises to the third floor and handicap accessible bathrooms.

Although approval from Maumee City Council is still pending, Rufty hopes to offer outside dining in a gated area. Council held a public hearing on the matter on Monday night.

The décor on the inside will remain similar to Gianni's current design, although the building itself will reflect its historical nature.

The owners have re-

exposed the brick once covered by drywall, so diners can see the historic value of the building. In addition, one wall will depict the history of the building with pictures, stories and artifacts that have been collected over the years.

For the benefit of inquiring visitors, the wait staff will be thoroughly educated on the history of the building as part of their basic training.

"Structurally, you will know you are in this older building, but some of my decorating will have a little bit more of a contemporary flair, like the restaurant has right now," Rufty said.

"The banquet room will be decorated more to the era of the building, and will in no way have an Italian theme to it, because we want people to know that if they are utilizing the banquet room, they can have any kind of food prepared for them; it doesn't have to be Italian food. And they don't have to feel like they have to do their event around an Italian theme," Rufty said.

Some slight menu changes will also play a part in the move. The lunch menu will undergo the biggest change, offering smaller entrees in luncheon portions.

Sandwiches will be added to the evening menu, and the restaurant will be open on Sundays, offering brunch items such as specialty omelets.

Gianni's staff is enthusiastic about the move.

The kitchen staff is especially thrilled about the enormous kitchen. All employees have had the opportunity to tour the building.

"I'm excited about the move because it will be a lot bigger, have a banquet room and it's closer to my house,"

Chris Snyder, a waiter who has worked for Gianni's for two and a half years, said.

"It's going to be nicer because (Greg) can plan right from the outset of moving in where he wants things, rather than having to work with a smaller building that has limited set-up options," Snyder said.

Gianni's Italian Bistro will celebrate its grand opening early this September.

Rufty plans to host a VIP open house on Friday and Saturday, September 2 and 3.

"The Friday event will be open to city officials, immediate friends and family of all those working for Gianni's, Gianni's 'regulars,' and immediate neighbors of the historic building," he explained.

"Saturday will be more of

an open house to the public. Both days will feature complimentary food via grazing stations and a cash bar."

Rufty doesn't just have big plans for his restaurant — he has big plans for the surrounding community as well. He plans to work on ways to promote the community.

"We would like to have a dinner and a movie night, in which we would team up with the Maumee Indoor Theater," Rufty said, "so that people could come and have dinner at our historic building, and then tickets to the Maumee Indoor Theater would be given with the meal, so that they can see a movie afterward."

"In ways like this we could be promoting the downtown Maumee area."

Gianni's Proposes Outdoor Dining, Council, Neighbors Share Concerns

Maumee City Council held a public hearing Monday night to discuss an outdoor seating area for Gianni's Italian Bistro at its new location along River Road.

Neighbors expressed their delight in having a new restaurant at that location, but offered concerns regarding noise in a residential area. Greg Rufty, co-owner of the former Linck Inn at 301 River Rd. and owner of Gianni's, assured the small crowd that Gianni's clientele is made up of "upscale and affluent" patrons who would not be likely to cause a ruckus.

"We're not a sports bar," he said. "This area is meant for dining, not for drinking or entertainment."

He said the seating area would be open from about May to September every year, weather permitting, and that he would abide by the city's noise ordinance and close the patio earlier than the indoor dining room if necessary.

Law director Sheila McAdams expressed concern that the outdoor dining area would be located in city property and the city could be held liable if liquor is served there. She recommended Rufty request a vacation, as opposed to a right-of-way variance, to assume responsibility of that portion of the property.

Council voted 7-0 to place these issues in the land use and zoning committee as well as issues relative to the lighting outside. The committee meeting has not yet been set, but council hopes to address the issue before the first council meeting in September.

Rufty hopes to open the establishment in September.