



ATLANTA CUISINE

Atlanta's Restaurant, Food and Drink Newspaper

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Nonna Mia Now Open

Around Town

Restaurants keep opening despite down economy.

by Tom Maicon

Atlanta – “It’s a great time to open a restaurant,” explains Steve Josovitz of the Shumacher Group, who is regarded by many as Atlanta’s restaurant real estate authority. “There are so many turnkey opportunities that require no money down,” Josovitz explains.

With the economy sputtering and consumer confidence at an all-time low it’s hard to imagine anyone wanting to open a restaurant right now.

“Believe it or not, I have more potential buyers now than ever before in my 20 plus years doing this,” says Josovitz. “The entrepreneurial spirit in this country is obviously alive and well.”

That entrepreneurial spirit we Americans are so proud of is apparently alive and kicking despite recent economic woes. Look around you. New restaurants keep popping up all over town, sticking their spatulas into the face adversity.

Recently in Midtown alone, three new restaurants have decided to test the waters: **Water Haven** (75 5th St., Midtown, 404.214.6740), **Nonna Mia** (980 Piedmont Ave., Midtown, 404.532.2815) and **Midtown Mediterranean Diner** (112 10th St., Midtown, 404.228.7401). All three seemed to arrive on the scene with plenty of dough to toss at build out.

In Smyrna, **L’Thai** opened a second location called **L’Thai West** (4500 West Village Place, Smyrna, 770.434.4344) late spring of this year with a third in the works in Roswell, slated to open late summer or

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possibly early fall. Both deals were signed within a week of each other.

The owners of **Spoon** recently expanded their popular Thai concept by opening an outpost on Moreland Avenue in East Atlanta. To this point the biggest challenge they face is crime. The restaurant has been repeatedly robbed.

Over in Virginia-Highland **D.B.A Barbecue** (1190 N. Highland Ave. Ste B, Virginia-highland, 404.249.5000) took over the space formerly occupied by Vine.

And the list goes on and on with plenty more on the way. Though many are signing leases fully aware of the state of the economy, others never intended to open a restaurant in the midst of the worst economic downturn in eighty years.

Take **Parker's on Ponce** (116 Ponce de Leon Ave. Decatur, 404.924.2230) for example. Co-owner J.T. Scott scouted the former Mick's location late 2007 before signing a lease early 2008.

"At that time money was flowing freely in Decatur," says Scott. "But shortly after we

signed the economy deteriorated."

By the time this sleek Decatur steakhouse opened its doors in November last year, the economic fallout had come to a head.

"We've been forced to adjust and become more value conscious," explains Scott, who now offers a \$6.95 lunch special.

Scott did tell me the restaurant is doing well despite it all and he seems to be taking it all in stride.

I've been asking for months why on earth anyone would open a restaurant in this economy. But think about it, people are still going out to eat. It's not like we're going to stop now. It's what we do and who we are. We've just changed our dining habits to adapt to this new economy.

And after I've had the chance to speak with those involved with bringing these restaurant to light, I think I understand a lot more.

Perhaps Josovitz hit the nail on the head — the entrepreneurial spirit in this country will never die.

Newsworthy Closing

Cabbagetown – Redfish (687 Memorial Dr., 404.475.1200) is the latest victim to fall to our ailing economy. Over the next six months I suspect we'll see a lot more carnage and if the economy stays where it is, which is likely, we'll see much more in the coming year or so, some will be shocking.

That part of Memorial Drive seems to lack the spirit you'd encounter west of Boulevard. "There's nothing on this side of Memorial to pull them in," explains chef/owner Gregg Herndon.

Perhaps Herndon is on to something. The Depot, which opened down the road on that same side between Boulevard

and Moreland, didn't even last six months yet everything that opens on Memorial Drive west of Boulevard seems to thrive.

Chef Herndon is probably most recognized for his work at Tiburon Grill in Virginia-Highland, where a sudden hike in rent forced him into a decision to close the restaurant instead of resigning his lease.

With the closing of Redfish we've lost another worthy Cajun restaurant, something this city lacks.

A fan of Herndon's cooking, I hope he resurfaces somewhere and sooner rather than later.