



Staff photo by Stacy Zeferes

From left, General Manager Reggie Tucker, Director of Operations Tony Heiser, Executive Chef Dung Nguyen and Manager Ray Trucksess stand behind the bar at Baxter's. The restaurant on East Market Street in West Chester will open on Monday. Baxter's is one of many restaurants to open in recent months hoping to help, with the new West Chester Restaurant Association, to grow an image of the borough as a dining destination.

Borough restaurants band together

Association hopes to promote 'safe, exciting place to eat and drink'

By SARAH E. MORAN
Staff Writer

WEST CHESTER — About 20 of the borough's restaurant owners have banded together to form the West Chester Restaurant Association.

The main purpose of the new group is to promote West Chester as a dining destination, according to David Magrogan, who owns Kildare's restaurant

and pub in the borough and just opened a second location in King of Prussia.

He is the new association's president. The association is open to the 47 eating and drinking establishments within the 16-block confines of West Chester's Business Improvement District (BID), as well as other places within the borough itself.

"We want to market West Chester as a safe, exciting place to eat and drink," Magrogan said. "We don't want to become known only as a bar town. And we don't want the parking problems of Old City (in Philadelphia) or Manayunk."

The restaurateurs are also encouraging retailers to stay open late on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights so that, if restaurant patrons have an hourlong wait for a table, they can shop in the interim, according to Whitney Collins, who owns the Ashley & Whitney women's boutique in the 100 block of West Market Street.

Collins' store will definitely stay open late, as will the Blink! women's boutique in the 100 block of West Gay Street and the new Oh, Baby maternity and infant store in the 100 block of North High Street.

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Other shopkeepers will probably follow suit, said Collins, who hopes to have the later hours in place by the end of March.

Shop and restaurant owners also want to put together a brochure that would list the stores that will stay open, to be passed out by the restaurants when a wait is inevitable.

Turks Head Inn owner Jack McFadden is also promoting a "Shop Till You Dine" event on Wednesday nights.

He wants stores to stay open late that night too. Restaurant association members would offer diners half-price appetizers or mixed drinks when they show a receipt from participating borough businesses.

Commented Magrogan: "The restaurant owners don't want to kill off each other's

businesses with \$1 drink nights. We want people to come to West Chester, and stay in West Chester."

The new restaurant group is testament to West Chester's growing reputation as a dining destination, whether at a white-tablecloth establishment or somewhere more casual, such as the new Subway sandwich shop in the unit block of West Market Street.

Among the borough restaurants to open in the last two months: Teca, in the unit block of West Gay Street; the Mexican eatery Coyote Crossing, on the southwest corner of East Market and South Walnut streets; and Kooma, a Japanese sushi restaurant in the 100 block of West Gay Street.

Meanwhile, Baxter's, across the street from Coyote Crossing, opens Monday.

A recent visit there found workers setting out salt and pepper shakers on tabletops and decorating the place for the expected crush of St. Patrick's Day

revelers.

Malcolm Johnstone, executive director of the West Chester BID, is largely credited with getting the restaurant group off the ground.

"West Chester should be known as a dining destination, a place where some restaurants offer alcohol, others are bring-your-own and still others are sandwich shops," he noted.

"We don't want to become simply a watering hole for the region. We looked at State College (where the main campus of Pennsylvania State University is located) as an example of what we don't want to become."

He would like to see the group become a 501(c)6 corporation, a not-for-profit group akin to a chamber of commerce.

The restaurant owners also want their own festival, one that focuses more on fine food than does West Chester's annual Restaurant Festival every September.