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Sunday, April 30, 2006

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Picasso's ready to make debut after much preparation



Picasso's rooftop dining area (Ron Campbell / Johnson City Press)

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After months of anticipation and curiosity from the surrounding area, Picasso's — the new restaurant housed in the former home of the Sophisticated Otter — will officially open its doors on Tuesday.

Picasso's Executive Chef and General Manager Rick Tabor said the support and interest from Johnson City has been overwhelming. Their dry runs for invited guests have already sold out, they've already taken several reservations for the restaurant's opening days, and hundreds of applications from East Tennessee State University students and others have come in to fill the restaurant's staff positions.

Tabor said he and Picasso's main owner, Dr. Daniel Paul, are extremely excited to open the restaurant's doors to the public. Tabor and Paul have been working on remodeling all three floors of the building and putting together every aspect of the business since December.

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“He (Paul) always wanted a restaurant,” Tabor said. “He wanted to be able to do something that would cater to ETSU, and he also wanted something that would benefit the downtown area. He’s very excited. We both are.”

Picasso’s will be open Tuesday through Thursday from 4 p.m. to midnight and Friday and Saturday from 4 p.m. to 2 a.m. Tabor said the first and third floors of the building will be open immediately, with renovation still being completed on the second floor. Tabor said when the second floor is finished it will serve as the restaurant’s piano bar.

When all three floors and Picasso’s outdoor patio are up and running, Tabor said the restaurant can seat around 800 guests. Those patrons will be treated to a completely different experience at Picasso’s than they may have been used to at the Sophisticated Otter.

Guests can pull up in the front and leave their cars with valets for the evening. Inside, the room housing the Otter’s brewing equipment has now been turned into a computer lounge with high speed Internet access. In the dining rooms, maroon linens cover tables, crystal glasses hang above the bar and thousands of dollars worth of art — both from local artists and from the James-Ben Studio and Gallery in Greeneville — adorn the walls.

As for the menu, Tabor — former executive chef with ETSU — said the variety and affordability of offerings won’t disappoint. Menu items include pasta, sandwiches, seafood and sirloin steaks. The prices are reasonable, with most entrees priced in the teens and sandwiches and appetizers under \$10. Picasso’s also provides a separate catering menu and space for banquets and events.

“We wanted sort of give people on this side of town an affordable, nice place to eat,” Tabor said. “Here you’ve got things like the sirloin for two for \$28.95, where you get a big 28 ounce sirloin to cut in half, two salads, two baked potatoes and two glasses of wine. If you don’t want to spend the money for the steak there’s pasta on there or chicken.”

Picasso’s will host live jazz, both on the first floor and outside patio, Wednesday through Saturday.

Picasso’s is located at 400 Ashe St. in Johnson City.

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