

What's the Buzz?

Annapolis Restaurant Buzz | April 2009



Punk's Backyard Grill recently opened at the Westfield Annapolis Mall. Pictured are the four grill masters, led by Chef Dean Maupin at far right.

Recently, *The Buzz*, had the distinct opportunity to visit the hip, new restaurant **Punk's Backyard Grill**, which opened at Westfield Annapolis Mall officially this past February. I ventured in prior to the grand opening to meet with co-owners Jeff Sloan and Sheila Laderberg, who led me from the front-of-house through the kitchen and back. Very cool décor throughout with a backyard, bbq feel. And yes indeed, yours truly was the very first individual to indulge in a tasty, Punk's burger—the first in the history of the universe of Punk's. And it was oh-so-good. The soon-to-be popular restaurant is the only of its kind, combining fresh fare for the sophisticated palate with a casual, cookout atmosphere and prompt service (place your order at the front counter, take a seat, and the food is delivered to your table). With a range of grilled meats and veggies, classy salads, comforting side dishes, and a bevy of beverages (beers, wine, Boylan's retro sodas), it altogether makes for a refreshing dining experience.

Several months ago, the closing of owner and chef Russell Brown's Northwoods restaurant, which for 25 years set the benchmark in Annapolis for fine dining, saddened us. We are now pleased to learn that Brown has found a new home at **The Rockfish**, as executive chef and general manager. His expertise is welcome at the Eastport establishment, which also has the reputation as being the only Environmental Protection Agency Certified Green Restaurant in Annapolis and features a rooftop herb and vegetable garden.

And in our longstanding quest to get to the bottom of what will happen to the downtown Annapolis property formerly occupied by the locals' favorite pub **Riordan's**, we chatted with the city's coordinator of economic affairs, Mike Miron. And, well, there's not much going on, other than a virtual stalemate between the building's Indiana-based owner, Dana Florestano, and potential business investors. Last spring, exterior-building renovations ceased when the contractor and Florestano disputed financial terms. Though the renovations have been completed since then, the asking rent by Florestano is much too expensive, according to Miron, to attract a viable lessee, especially given the economic climate. To make matters more complicated, if a restaurant tenant is not found soon, the current dining and alcohol permits will expire and the re-application process for said permits would commence, which could be a

lengthy process, considering extensive interior renovations would be needed to bring the building up to current code standards. Hmm, high rent and expensive renovations. What's not to like about this deal? Miron hopes Florestano begins to exercise some savvy in the ongoing pursuit to find a tenant.

Do you have an opinion about this situation? Email your thoughts to JHouck@WhatsUpMag.com and *What's Up? Annapolis* might publish your letter in an upcoming issue. As always, please address your dining news, tips, and suggestions to managing editor James Houck at the aforementioned email address.

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