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VOL. 126 | NO. 207 | Monday, October 24, 2011

Bleu Latest Addition To Downtown Dining Scene

By Sarah Baker Updated 2:16PM
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It's safe to say that it's been a banner year for Downtown's dining options. Within the past 12 months or so, restaurant openings have included Thai Bistro and The Brass Door on Madison Avenue; City Market, Krispy Krunchy Chicken and the Green Beetle on Main Street; and Rizzos Diner on G.E. Patterson Avenue, to name a few.

And now, with the opening of bleu restaurant & lounge at [221 S. Third St.](#), Downtown's diverse restaurant portfolio has expanded even more. The new eatery replaces the former Sole Restaurant & Raw Bar in the Westin Memphis Beale Street across from FedExForum.

The concept of bleu is American-European with regional influences, presented by executive chef Robert Nam Cirillo, who was born in South Korea and adopted at the age of 5 by an Italian and Irish family.

"Growing up, my grandmother came from Italy, she taught me how to make pasta, so food's been a very intricate part of my life," Cirillo said. "Growing up and realizing that America is a melting pot of culture, I also realized that it's a melting pot of cuisines and different kind of food from all over the world, so that has broadened my horizon to be able to mold any kind of food that's out there."

A restaurant industry veteran for more than 16 years, Cirillo draws menu inspirations from his experiences growing up in central New York and most recently, Providence, R.I.

"Being in Rhode Island, I had a beautiful abundance of fresh fish that I was able to use," Cirillo said. "Down here, it's a totally different kind of program – more homey, very warm, inviting food."

Cirillo was recruited to Memphis from his longtime friend and business partner, [Patrick Jordan](#). Currently the Westin's general manager, Jordan worked with Cirillo at a hotel and restaurant in Providence, which received best new restaurant awards from two local publications.

"(Jordan) came back down here because his family was down here, and this opportunity came where the hospitality wanted to take control and do their own restaurant," Cirillo said. "It's one of those opportunities I just couldn't say 'no' to."

The opportunity arose because Sole – an American and seafood concept that opened in November 2008 by the owners of Interim Restaurant & Bar – was closing its doors. Prior to Sole, the restaurant space housed the Daily Grill, an American chain still associated with many Westin hotels nationwide.

After months of due diligence, Jordan is bullish that the bleu concept is fitting for Westin's restaurant space.

"We've had some focus groups and the feedback has been absolutely phenomenal," Jordan said. "The staff is training very, very hard to really improve the service because obviously with an opening, the excitement of something new will make the restaurant popular for a while, but it's the initial experience they have that will bring the people back. It's just one

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|---------------------|-----|------|--------|
| PROPERTY SALES | 48 | 48 | 12,444 |
| MORTGAGES | 59 | 59 | 18,306 |
| FORECLOSURE NOTICES | 0 | 0 | 8,058 |
| BUILDING PERMITS | 176 | 176 | 32,197 |
| BANKRUPTCIES | 75 | 75 | 15,154 |
| BUSINESS LICENSES | 19 | 19 | 4,861 |
| UTILITY CONNECTIONS | 263 | 263 | 22,455 |
| MARRIAGE LICENSES | 39 | 39 | 4,782 |

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|-------------|-----|-----|-------|
| Nasdaq | 58 | 2.2 | 2,696 |
| NYSE | 0 | 0.0 | 7,431 |
| Morningstar | 131 | 2.9 | 4,691 |
| Small Cap | | | |

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more reason for people to come or stay Downtown.”

The idea behind bleu is to be chic, yet casual and comfortable, Cirillo said. Guests can opt for light hors d'oeuvres, entrees with suggested wine pairings and tableside-served desserts in the dining room. Or they can reside in the lounge area and listen to live jazz while sipping on a blueberry muddled, thyme and lemon juice-infused Bleu Steel martini.

“We want to present ourselves as fine dining, but we also want let people feel comfortable coming in here,” Cirillo said.

And that comfort level isn't just limited to dinner hours. In addition to a full breakfast menu, bleu also offers a lunch program where customers can build their own sandwich from a sushi menu checklist.

“You have your choice of meat between burger, tuna, Ahi (tuna), portabella mushroom, chicken, and then on top of that, you pick out whatever toppings you want,” Cirillo said. “So instead of saying that we have the best burger, we'd like to have our guests build the best burger.”

Indeed, word of mouth is bleu's main marketing objective. But the opening has been supplemented by a teaser campaign from [The Red Rover Co.](#), including “mystery” appearances at the Zoo Rendezvous, on television, and in email blasts. In the coming weeks, bleu will utilize print, social media and billboard advertising.

Bleu is open until 10 p.m. from Monday through Wednesday, 11 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, and 4 p.m. on Sundays.

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