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TRANSITIONS

By Eric E. Harrison
This article was published August 16, 2012 at 3:31 a.m.

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LITTLE ROCK – The word is long out that 21c Museum Hotels is building a big hostelry at 200 N.E. A St., in Bentonville, targeted to open in the first quarter of 2013, in connection with the Crystal Bridges museum. This week we got word that its restaurant, about which there has been practically no information heretofore, will be called

The Hive, and its executive chef is Matthew McClure, former sous-chef at

Ashley's at the Capital Hotel, where he worked under former executive chef Lee Richardson.

McClure, who says he hasn't completely worked out what dishes he'll be serving, says he is being given creative freedom and even had some input in the name, although he didn't come up with it.

He says he'll be aiming toward emphasizing "the unique culinary identity of Arkansas," while showcasing the region's farmers and produce. A news release explains that McClure is developing "a program that is true to the High South, highlighting ingredients such as black walnuts, freshly milled cornmeal, hickory-smoked hams, peaches, melons and sweet onions."

"I've kind of had some time to just lock myself in a room with cookbooks, menus and the Internet, and I've started coming up with banquet, bar, room amenity and dinner menus," he explains. "I've had a very large start."

McClure says neither henor 21c is interested in gimmickry, but they are on the same page in terms of being "fun and interactive." So while you won't see a lot of dishes where the main ingredient is honey, there is the possibility the china, glass and silver might feature little bees, and McClure speculates that there might be an actual beehive somewhere on the premises. (A couple of New York hotels have been putting beehives on their roofs and using the honey in their restaurants, so it's not such a radical idea.)

McClure, a Little Rock native, worked mostly in chain restaurants as a youngster, then headed to the New England Culinary Instituteand subsequently settled in Boston, where his employers have included

No. 9 Park, Tro

quet

and Harvest. He returned to Little Rock four years ago with his wife, Jenny, to join Richardson at the Capital.

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TOP JOBS

“He really did build the best food and beverage operation I’ve ever worked in,” Mc-Clure says. “I’m thrilled to be cooking in this capacity in my home state, and I’m hoping to expand that to Northwest Arkansas.”

Fans of

Whole Hog Cafe

will be delighted to learn that several of its restaurants are now open Sundays, including the two in Little Rock: the original at 2516 Cantrell Road - 11 a.m.-8 p.m. daily, (501) 664-5025 - and the one in Rock Creek Plaza, 12111 W.Markham St. - 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Friday-Saturday, (501) 907-6124. A check of the website, wholehogcafe.com, and a couple of phone calls also reveal Sunday hours in Conway, 150 E. Oak St., 11 a.m.-2 p.m., (501) 513-0600; and Bryant, 5309 Arkansas 5 N., 11 a.m.-8 p.m., (501) 653-2244. The North Little Rock outlet, 5107 Warden Road, (501) 753-9227, is not open Sunday. (Also open Sundays, by the way: franchises in Springfield, Mo., and Albuquerque and Santa Fe, N.M.)

Last week we reported the reduction in hours at

Dogtown Coffee and Cookery, 6725 John F. Kennedy Blvd., North Little Rock. We didn’t report, because we didn’t know at the time, that chef/general manager Jason Godwin, the restaurant’s founder, is no longer there. Godwin’s mother told one of our sharp-eared correspondents that he’s taking a complete break from the food industry for awhile. The restaurant phone number is (501) 833-3850.

Among the casualties of the disappearance of Yarnell’s Ice Cream in the summer of 2011 was the purple vanilla ice cream with which the

Purple Cow

restaurants in Arkansas used to make its purple milkshakes. Now that Yarnell’s Premium Ice Cream is back in production in Searcy, it is also back at the three Arkansas Purple Cow outlets - 8026 Cantrell Road and 11602 Chenal Parkway, Little Rock, and 1490 Higdon Ferry Road, Hot Springs. All three will also carry Yarnell’s orange sherbet (“the base for our delicious Dreamsicle,” says Purple Cow President Todd Gold) and mint chocolate chip icecream, which, according to a Yarnell’s news release, are not found in stores. And to mark the auspicious return, the first 100 customers at each Purple Cow location during designated times today and Friday will receive a free purple milkshake: 11 a.m.-2 p.m. today in Hot Springs, 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Friday at the original on Cantrell Road and 3-5 p.m. at the one on Chenal Parkway. Check out the website, purplecowlr.com.

Early November is the target to open the

Panera Bread

outlet under construction just off the intersection of Kanis and Shackleford roads in west Little Rock, according to Renee Eifert, marketing director for franchisee Traditional Bakery Inc./Oklahoma City Bakery, which operates the restaurants in Northwest and central Arkansas. Eifert says a “coming soon” banner is, well, coming soon. And one of our sharp-eyed correspondents reports the demolition of the next-door shack, formerly occupied by

Burger Mama’s, which will eventually become a

Dunkin’ Donuts

.

Morina’s Italian Restaurant, 2006 S. Pine St., Cabot, has opened a second outlet, in the Motel 6, 200 U.S. 67/167 N., Jacksonville. Hours are 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. The phone number is (501) 457-7542. It’s not yet listed on the website, SorellasItalian-Restaurant.com.

And speaking of Italian restaurants, Hot Springs’ venerable

Facci’s Italian Ristorante, 2900 Central Ave., across from Oaklawn’s parking area, is no more. It’s been replaced by

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Blanche's Soul Food, featuring ribs, catfish and barbecue, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. daily. The phone number is (501) 623-9049.

Has a restaurant opened - or closed - near you in the last week or so? Does your favorite eatery have a new menu? Is there a new chef in charge? Drop us a line. Call (501) 399-3667 or (501) 378-3513, or send a note to Restaurants, Weekend Section, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, 121 E. Capitol Ave., Little Rock, Ark. 72201. Send e-mail to:

eharrison@arkansasonline.com

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