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New gathering spaces installed downtown

By Mary Anne Gates

Re-imagining how various pockets of downtown Fort Wayne can be used took place over the spring and summer. The Downtown Improvement District (DID) teamed up with Smart Building and Design to create outdoor spaces, often called parklets or patios. People living, working or coming downtown can enjoy a meal, just sit and relax or gather and chat with friends.

"We are trying to provide outdoor space for anybody that is downtown, but in particular for the restaurant customers," Michael Galbraith, president & CEO of the Downtown Improvement District, said this summer. Adding, "We are trying to provide spaces where people can stop and linger a bit while downtown."

According to a social media post by Smart Building and Design, parklets are lined with planters to help improve visibility and safety. Criteria for choosing parklet locations include areas that lack outdoor seating or have challenges with parking, Galbraith said.

A parklet opened this year next door to Sweets On Main, 123 W. Main St. Several colorful tables and chairs were put into the space, named PNC Plaza for the sponsor. Large planters border and define the space. A mural adorns an adjacent wall. Additionally, shade sails providing general shade are expected to be installed next year, he said.

Two more traditional parklets, both comparably designed but functioning differently, also opened this year. One is located on Wayne Street in front of Big Apple Pizza, 120 W. Wayne St. The other parklet serves the area by the Lewis Street Grill, 425 E. Lewis St.

"They are both similarly designed with pavers that extend the walkable surface area of the sidewalk so it remains ADA accessible," Galbraith said. Adding, "However, they are two different types of parklets in terms of their function."

Because the Lewis Street Grill does not serve alcohol, people can cross the public sidewalk to

access the parklet with tables, chairs and planter boxes.

In contrast, the parklet in front of Big Apple Pizza, which has a beer and wine license, has been extended 4 feet. The extension doubles the area where people can sit outside to enjoy pizza in good weather. More importantly, customers don't cross a public sidewalk because Indiana law prohibits serving a customer alcohol if they have to cross a public right-of-way, Galbraith said.

While several parklets are new this year, the Porch Off Calhoun, opened in 2019, continued to beckon customers from nearby eateries and passers-by, as well. The Porch Off Calhoun was located in the parking spaces adjacent to the alley on Calhoun Street next to Pint 'n Slice, 816 S. Calhoun St.

"The Porch Off Calhoun between Wayne and Berry was the first parklet experiment done here," Galbraith said.

The parklets cost \$40,000 and are funded through a partnership with the Knight Foundation, the Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne and the City of Fort Wayne, Galbraith said.

The Porch Off Calhoun was expected to close around the end of October. Furniture that is owned by DID was to be removed to protect it. Barriers, like planter boxes, that impede efficient snow removal were also to be removed, a DID spokesperson said.

Similarly, DID-owned patio furniture and planter boxes at other parklets, including Big Apple Pizza and the Lewis Street Grill patios, were expected to be removed near the end of October for the coming winter months.

"Our ultimate goal is to give downtown Fort Wayne and its restaurants the ability to have lively streets. We want people to be able to sit outside and enjoy healthy food while patronizing our downtown restaurants," Galbraith said. Adding, "People are responding well and exceeding our expectations. Particularly on a weekend night everything is packed" over the summer.



Mary Anne Gates



Mary Anne Gates



A parklet at Lewis Street Grill, 425 E. Lewis St., increased the outdoor dining area for customers.

Mary Anne Gates



Sweets On Main sports a mural on its side near a gathering spot set up where its customers and those of neighboring Fort Wayne's Famous Coney Island can enjoy their food.

Lisa Esquivel Long

Colorful furniture fills the PNC Plaza in parking spaces along Main Street in Fort Wayne by the PNC Bank building.



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By Lisa Esquivel Long

With the arrival of Giordano's in 2020, it seemed like a good idea to see how it stacked up to some local favorites in the Chicago-style pizza category.

Giordano's, home to Chicago's famous stuffed deep-dish pizza, opened its first Fort Wayne store at 10180 Diebold Road in late October 2020. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it had to wait to celebrate its grand opening until Sept. 30 of this year.

Tom Fife's family-owned and -operated Fort Wayne Giordano's in partnership with Russell Bry doesn't mess with the corporate recipes when it comes to dough and its Wisconsin cheese and tomatoes from California.

Despite knowing it's rep, I decided to get some input from a small group. We were already having a meeting, which usually involves food, so this seemed like the perfect excuse to do an unscientific taste-test.

It required a lot of timing and driving on my part to get several fan favorites from around the county. Each was piping hot when I picked it up, with the servers opening the box to show me what was inside. I wasn't used to that with my normal pan pizzas.

My group tried the double pies from Timmy's Pizza & BBQ of Huntertown, Giordano's and Oley's Southwest.

We tasted one other, but no one had anything positive of note on it, so we're leaving it out here.

Because 2 hours had passed from the time of the first pickup until I got to our meeting place, we didn't judge the temperature.

From Timmy's, I ordered the 12-inch medium Deluxe Pizza with special instructions to make it Chicago-

style with a second crust. It was \$15.64 with tax.

From Giordano's, I got the small Giordano's Chicago Classic Deep Dish for \$23.38.

From Oley's Southwest I got the small deep dish deluxe for \$20.52.

By appearances, the Giordano's was a bit of a piece of art with its bits of green peppers and a mushroom arranged on top to showcase the ingredients included. Timmy's was white from all the thick cheese on top. Oley's had a classic mix of bubbling cheese.

We started with Timmy's, which we felt had good flavor with its sausage, pepperoni, onions, green olives, the ingredients I made sure to include in all the pizzas. "It doesn't seem like a lot of sauce," I told the group. Some in the group said they were not big "saucy" people, so they liked it. However, we all liked the crust.

Next came Giordano's, the very structured one. It had a creamy cheese inside.

"Mmm. I really liked that," one person said.

"It had bigger chunks of vegetables," said another.

The dough had no flavor. "The dough is an afterthought," one person said, but "I think it presents the best."

The ingredients packed in the flavor.

Oley's Southwest had "Good flavor," "The sauce is better ... like a fresh sauce," came the comments.

Our group was pretty unanimous: the winner was Giordano's, followed by Timmy's and then Oley's Southwest.

We'd like Giordano's ingredients in Timmy's crust. Now that would be a pizza.

Chicago-style pizza earning a rep in the Fort

Lisa Esquivel Long



Results

Best crust: [Timmy's Pizza & BBQ of Huntertown](#)

Best ingredients: [Giordano's](#)

Honorable mention: [Oley's Southwest](#)

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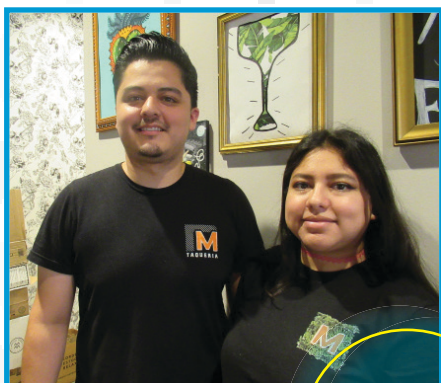
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Mary Anne Gates

Johnny and Esli
Perez, Mercado
co-owners.

By Mary Anne Gates

A long-held dream of owning a restaurant has come true for budding entrepreneurs Johnny and Esli Perez. In February, after pandemic-related delays, they opened the Mercado on The Landing. The word "mercado" means "market" in English.

"As a teenager I always loved cooking. I love everything to do with the restaurant business," Johnny Perez said. Adding, "My family, in California, has a couple of restaurants. Somehow, it runs in the blood."

The cozy, well-lighted eatery, complete with a large outdoor patio, serves a blend of California and Mexican cuisine featuring Chicano-inspired flavors.

"Our patio seats 35 to 40. When it's over 50 degrees everyone wants to eat on the patio. It is nice having a pretty big patio," Esli Perez said.

Locally, the husband-and-wife team began their dream of restaurant ownership with a food truck in 2019. Johnny cooked and served food on the Mercadito ("little market") food truck. Meanwhile, Esli managed the business side of the venture while holding a teaching job.

Customers liked the food, and the couple developed a good social media presence. Eventually, an opportunity to open a restaurant on The Landing presented itself.

"We talked about it and decided that if we do this restaurant, we both need to be here and be involved. So, I left my job teaching anatomy and physiology at Ivy Tech," Esli Perez said.

The menu

The restaurant at 111 W. Columbia St., Suite 103, serves guests tempting lunch and dinner treats.

Featured items include: Salsa Crusted Ribeye steak, a spicy fried chicken sandwich offered on the menu as "Cries in Spanish" and a made-to-order Golden State Burrito.

Additionally, a popular lunch special is the taco combo served with two tacos and a choice of beans or rice. Another favorite is Chicano chicken served with garlic potatoes and queso sauce.

The Pachola Burger, a West Coast burger, is served with double patties and double American cheese, onion, lettuce, "guac" sauce and spread.

"Gauc sauce is like guacamole in salsa form," Esli Perez said. Adding, "It really sets the burger apart."

A Saturday Brunch features a chorizo-egg-and-potato burrito topped with cheese. Another popular brunch option is chicken and waffles.



The Chicano
chicken is a
popular menu
item.

Mary Anne Gates

Finding staff

Initially, staffing was a concern in the post-pandemic era. However, the concern was unfounded due to wait staff being eager to return to work.

"We were worried about getting staff, but we were able to get the staff we needed. People were excited to come back to the hospitality industry," she said. Adding, "The restaurant currently has about 30 full- and part-time staff."

Running a restaurant

Despite dreams of restaurant ownership and a family culinary heritage there was still a lot to learn. Johnny began formal training by cooking at the Anthis Career Center. Then he went to culinary school in Rhode Island.

"This (restaurant) has been years in the making. Definitely, I feel like it is our creation," Esli Perez said.

Returning to Fort Wayne, Johnny started by working in a restaurant kitchen. Then he moved to the dining room to learn that part of the business.

"In the front of the house we are meeting new guests, taking reservations, clearing plates, and doing anything that needs to be done," he said.

As restaurant owners and operators there are still more things that need to be done and more decisions to be made, according to the couple.

"As owner-operators we make our own decisions. New situations come up that have to be dealt with, and we have to make those calls," Esli Perez said.

One recent example was choosing the days the restaurant would be open. The final decision may not have been popular with everyone.

"A lot of people wanted us to be open on Sunday. The Landing is supposed to be a destination place. Sunday is a day most people have off. However, we decided at this time, for us and our staff, it would be most beneficial to have Sundays off," she said.

Going forward

Plans call for growing the current business, creating opportunities and considering an additional store.

"We are about six months in here at the brick-and-mortar restaurant, and it has opened up our eyes. We are growing and want to create more opportunities for the staff and ourselves. Possibly we can open another store in the future and strengthen our current operations," Johnny Perez said.

Lisa Esquivel Long



A portion of a mural inside Mercado features an image of the late Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, left.



A mural on Mercado.

Lisa Esquivel Long

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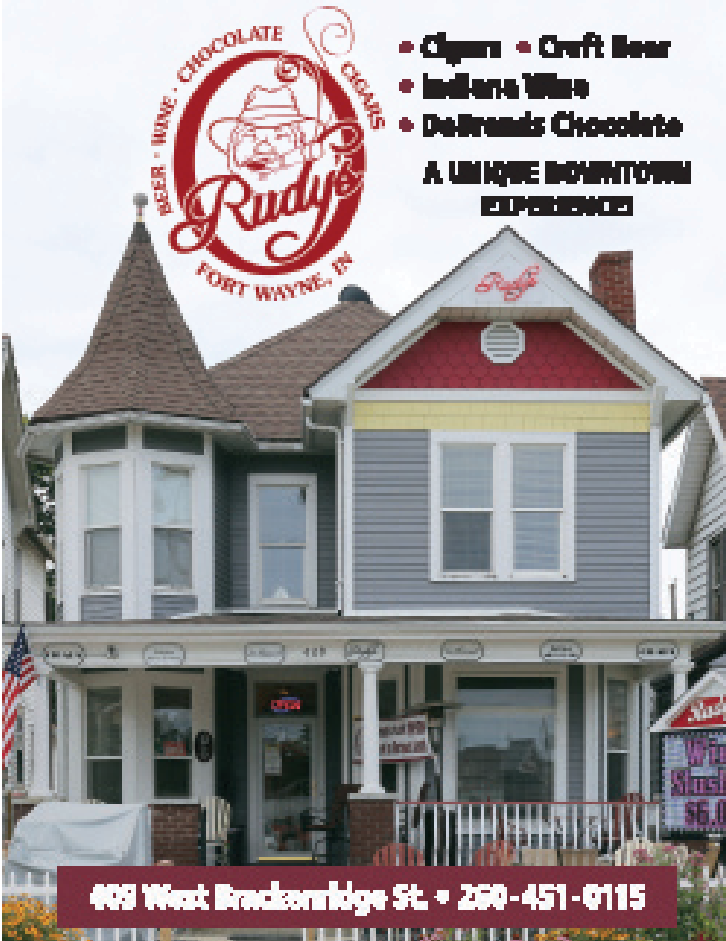
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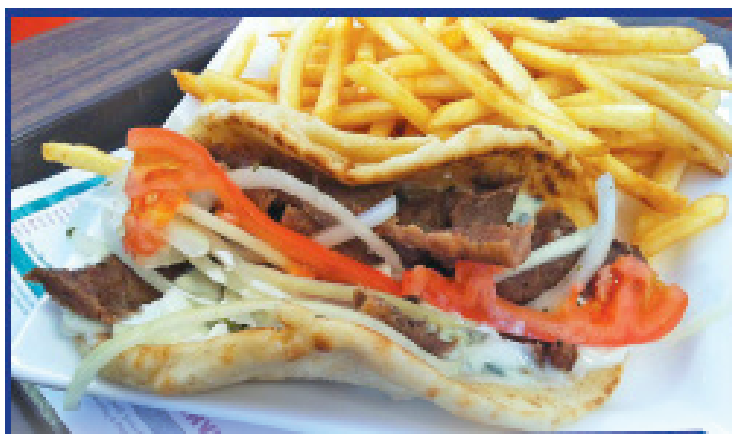


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Utopian Coffee & Kitchen and the Landing Beer Company share a vision

By Mary Anne Gates

Brendon Maxwell and Caleb France, co-owners of the Utopian Coffee & Kitchen and the Landing Beer Company, share a vision, a kitchen, and an address on The Landing. The restaurants are adjacent at 118 W. Columbia St. Both men envision creating an environment that ensures customer satisfaction and a pleasant dining experience.

"There is a shared vision for what we desire to create here and how people can be welcomed into an environment that is friendly and seeks to make their day better than before they stepped through the doors," Brendon Maxwell said.

Besides creating a welcoming environment, they make their own pastries.

"We strive to be the friendliest cafe in the city. Also, we are unique in that, we bake all our own pastries fresh each day; alongside serving breakfast and lunch all day long," Maxwell said.

Sharing the kitchen enables France and Maxwell to offer their own unique menu items.

"With a shared kitchen we have the ability to carry two separate identities, such as BBQ and brunch. With that being said, we also have the capacity to make someone's favorite item at both restaurants throughout the day," he said.

Early-morning menu items featured at Utopian Coffee & Kitchen include a bacon and egg sandwich with coffee-rubbed bacon, gouda cheese, a farm egg, and spicy aioli served on a brioche bun. A variety of quiche selections are also served on a rotating schedule.

"Our bacon and sausage breakfast sandwiches are staples to our breakfast menu and are great for grab-and-go options on your way to work," Maxwell said.

Just in time for lunch, the Landing Beer Company serves up tasty lunch sandwiches and salads beginning at 11 a.m. Sandwiches include a crispy chicken sandwich with pepper jack cheese, hot sauce, pickles, and buttermilk aioli served on a brioche bun with kettle chips.

Unique coffee selections are sourced from around the world and mean more than just drinking a great cup of coffee.

"As we are the flagship cafe to Utopian Coffee Roastery (which is located a floor above us), we are partial to our black coffee, which is intentionally sourced from countries of origin to empower the farmers who grew it," Maxwell said.

"The first time I was at a coffee farm overseas it allowed me to see that coffee was a product that we could use to impact lives around the world. Since then, we have been investing time, energy, and resources in Southeast Asia, Central and South America, and East Africa," he said.

The challenges coffee farmers endure are not lost on the local entrepreneurs. Some of the triumphs the far-flung growers enjoy are shared with the

If You Go

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Website: utopiancafe.com

Landing Beer Company

Phone: 260-265-2022

Hours:

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11 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday-Saturday
(bar can be open later)

Website: landingbeer.com

Where: 118 W. Columbia St.
The restaurants are adjacent to each.

Mary Anne Gates



Landing Beer Company and Utopian Coffee & Kitchen Patio. (Table seating closer to street)

restaurant's coffee-drinking clientele.

"Some of what we see is challenging because coffee is a tough business to be in as a farmer. But there are incredible stories of hope and we get to see the powerful and restorative work that coffee can bring about as well," Maxwell said.

Victories for coffee growers include better wages, access to education, regular meals and land ownership.

"We are seeing farmers in Colombia get paid more for their hard work than they did growing coca, wrapped up in dangerous cycles in the drug trade. We are seeing women in Guatemala own land for the first time through an amazing cooperative we work with. We're seeing children of coffee farmers who were once stuck in extreme poverty now thriving because they were given a K-12 education and meals every day. There are incredible stories happening throughout the world and we're honored to be able to be a small part of that," he said.

As the demand for hand-crafted beverages increases, offering craft beers made sense and was another way to offer customers something special.

"We know that people like to enjoy products that are crafted on-site, and with the plans already set to roast coffee here, we thought that the addition of another craft beverage that can be consumed later in the day would be a wonderful pairing," France said.

Besides uniquely sourced coffee some of the most popular craft beers are available.

"We have a couple of staples that we have started to can regularly now. Mid-westerly (IPA), Hazing Landing (NEIPA), and Good Idea (Blonde), in addition to a couple that rotate like Landed Lager and Knockabout (Stout). Those beers can be bought by the pint or in the can from the brewery now," he said.

Because the pair started their venture during the uncertainty of COVID-19 they say they are more focused on today.

"Starting in the midst of the pandemic, we've learned that there are lots of variables we cannot control. But, I can tell you that we want to continue to be focused on the customer experience," France said.

While focused on today, plans include more craft brews, more coffee tastings and facility tours.

"We plan to have a larger core of staple beers with a consistent and high-quality rotating selection," he said.

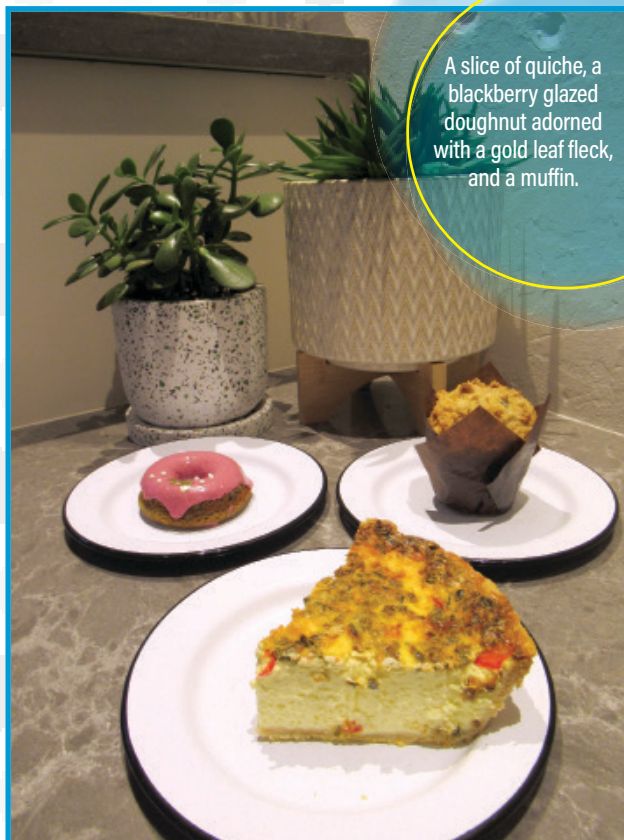
Similarly, Utopian Coffee & Kitchen's plans call for more cuppings (coffee tastings), and tours.

"One of the things we look forward to incorporating is more public events, ranging from cuppings to tours of the roasting facility," Maxwell said.



Landing Beer Company and Utopian Coffee & Kitchen Patio. Patio booth (closer to eateries).

Mary Anne Gates



A slice of quiche, a blackberry glazed doughnut adorned with a gold leaf fleck, and a muffin.

Mary Anne Gates



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Rick Doering, stands beside his wood-fired pizza oven.

Mary Anne Gates

By Mary Anne Gates

What started out as a desire to have a backyard pizza oven has turned into a thriving business. First came a food truck and then, more recently, Alto Grado Food and Beverage Company on The Landing. The pizzeria is located at 111 W. Columbia St., Suite 102.

Rick Doering, the sole owner, was researching backyard pizza ovens when an opportunity to open a pizza place came his way. Locally sourced meats, fresh mozzarella cheese and cold fermented dough are keys to the distinctive flavor of the Alto Grado pizzas.

"We like to say, 'we only buy ingredients we don't buy food.' Everything is handmade in-house. We make all of our dough fresh from scratch every week. All of our dough is cold fermented for at least 48 hours. That gives it a lot more flavor, a light, flaky texture, and it is much more digestible. We also have a wonderful house-made gluten-free crust that people just rave about," Doering said.

A large variety of pizzas are available, including the Queen, a classic Margherita pizza with red sauce, grated pecorino, fresh mozzarella, extra-virgin olive oil and basil. The Carné, a meat pizza, includes pepperoni, Italian sausage, and Black Forest ham. Another favorite is the Detroit-style pizza featuring three cheeses — Grande Mozzarella, Monterey Jack and Wisconsin Brick — baked in a classic rectangular pan. Diners can also build their own pizza with an extensive list of ingredients on hand. Baked grinders, dessert pizzas and breadsticks are also available.

"We do two styles of pizza. We do a Neo-Neapolitan-style pizza. It's based on using fresh ingredients, the same as they would use in Naples, Italy. We also do a Detroit deep-dish style pizza. Everything about it is different. We use a different tomato, a different sauce, a different flour and a different oven, but it is equally wonderful," he said.

Additionally, Alto Grado has selections that cater to vegan preferences.

"We also have many vegan options. All of our dough and sauces are always vegan. Our plant-based pizzas can be topped with vegan cheese to make any of our pizzas vegan.

Doering has plans to grow the business. He is looking at several future ventures.

"We are absolutely a pizzeria, but our name includes 'Food and Beverage Company' because we plan to expand into many other areas. Before COVID we baked all the bread for Antonuccio's Italian Market, a south-side grocery store. We are working on bringing that back," he said.

Besides baking bread for a small local grocery store, Doering has several other plans in the works for his flourishing business. These plans include opening a store at Electric Works.

"We have been talking to the architects and have verbal approval from the bank to proceed. Other details are still being worked out," he said.

Catering for various events and operating his food truck in season are other items on his agenda.

"We also do a ton of catering. We cater weddings. Another big part of our story is starting out with the food truck at the local wineries including Kekionga Craft Company, 7328 Maysville Road, makers of hard cider and Ambrosia Orchard, Hoagland. And, we have the food truck out for various concerts at Sweetwater," he said. Adding, "In season, we are like a staple at the (Ft. Wayne's Farmers Market, which has moved from McCulloch Park to indoors at Parkview Field for the cold months.)

Building an outdoor kitchen for his backyard and researching brick Tuscan ovens propelled Doering to ownership of Alto Grado Food and Beverage Company and his pizza-making side hustle. Currently, he still holds a day job as the director of engineering for an automotive company.

"I stumbled onto a company that sells mobile units and provides training and equipment to make pizzas as a business. I bought a book entitled 'Rolling in the Dough,' a 350-page manual on everything about making wood-fired pizzas. Two years later we were a feature story in that book," he said.

Alto Grado, with its 42-seat patio, has only been open about a year. The pizzeria was originally scheduled to open in July 2020 but was pushed back to November 2020 due to COVID-19. However, the food truck has been all over town since 2017.

"We just keep making food, and people keep showing up. So, we just keep on making more food," Doering said. Adding, "We refer to this as The Landing pizzeria."

By Mary Anne Gates

Approaching The Landing via Harrison Street from the north offers passersby a commanding view of Tim Parsley's bison mural. Behind the approximately 6,000-square-foot mural, which covers the entire east side of the multi-story building, sits the spacious and covered Nawa Bison Deck. The large semi-covered space is accessed from inside the Nawa restaurant. Some customers describe the deck as the best place to enjoy summer.

Additionally, Nawa features a smaller, cozy patio located in front of the eatery that can be accessed from the sidewalk on The Landing.

"The deck and the patio are both great places to hang out with friends," Audrey, a recent diner on the deck, said.

Enjoying a prominent location on The Landing just around the corner from the entrance to Promenade Park, Nawa serves food that is a feast for the eye as well as the palate. Co-operating partners Te Boriboonnangkul and Prill Trowbridge, who have roots in Thailand, describe it as "Inspired Asian Cuisine" on both their website and their respective business cards.

A few of the most popular, colorful, and tasty dishes the two women serve up at Nawa include Salmon with Green Curry, Pad Thai, Drunken Noodle, Basil Fried Rice and Cashew Nut Stir Fry. In addition, the Hawaiian fried rice is a large portion of savory and mildly seasoned rice served in a half-pineapple.

Just as important as choosing their signature menu items, the duo searched for a good name for their restaurant.

It was important to them that the name was easy to pronounce and easy to remember. They also wanted the name to reflect their heritage as well as their current surroundings on The Landing. Finally, they wanted the name to reinforce the welcoming environment they

were trying to create in the popular downtown gathering space.

"The name Nawa means 'New Beginning,'" Trowbridge, co-operating partner, said. "It was a good meaning and not too difficult to remember or pronounce. For us it is the new beginning of a Thai/Asian-style of restaurant that is not just focused on food. We want to be the place where people can have good food, good drinks and a warm Asian ambiance that welcomes everyone to want to hang out after dinner."

Boriboonnangkul and Trowbridge developed their culinary background during the time they spent in a Bangkok eatery where they perfected their cooking skills. They also learned a lot about the business side of running a restaurant.

"My partner Te and I both worked at a bar and restaurant in Bangkok, Thailand, back before we moved to work here in the United States in 2001," Trowbridge said.

Additionally, like many aspiring cooks a young Trowbridge gained experience initially by working in her family kitchen where her mother provided quite a few cooking lessons along the way.

"I pretty much learned how to cook from my mom by helping her when I was young," Trowbridge said.

Nawa opened on Jan. 2, 2018, and has enjoyed a steady stream of customers discovering fine Asian cuisine.

Currently, Boriboonnangkul and Trowbridge are laser-focused on ensuring their customers enjoy the food, the patios and general vibe of their Asian-fusion restaurant.

"We are so excited about the momentum and development downtown. Fort Wayne is on the roll! We just want to continue to deliver a great Asian dining and bar experience. We just want to perfect what we are already doing on The Landing," Trowbridge said.

NAWA restaurant under the bison

If You Go

Nawa Restaurant

On The Landing
at 126 W. Columbia St.

Hours:

11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. and 5-9 p.m.
Monday-Saturday.

Open until 10 p.m.
Friday and Saturday.

11:30 a.m.-3 p.m. and 4-8 p.m.
Sunday

Phone: 260-399-7501

Website:

www.nawa.live



Enjoy a meal on the partially covered Nawa Bison Deck.

Mary Anne Gates



Pan-seared salmon with Green Curry sauce.

Mary Anne Gates

Behind the walls is The Patio On Wells

If You Go
The Patio On Wells
4201 N. Wells St.
Phone: 260-422-5292
Website:
<http://eventsbyyolo.com>

Cristina Shank,
co-owner, is seen
with Mike Snider,
bartender.



Mary Anne Gates

Diners enjoy
The Patio On Wells.



Mary Anne Gates

By Mary Anne Gates

Showcasing The Patio On Wells this past summer became a priority for co-owners Cristina and Benjamin Shank.

The hidden gem at 4201 N. Wells St. is screened away from highway traffic and the parking lot by a tall, wooden privacy fence. Large shrubs and planter boxes adorn both sides of the fence that add curb appeal outside the fence while creating a gardenlike setting for the patio inside.

"We acquired Flashback and Yolo in August 2020," Cristina said after touring the facility. "One of the things that attracted us most to the venue was the patio and the outdoor space. It was so pretty we wondered if we could make it a place where people could come and enjoy time outdoors."

The mother-and-son team quickly looked for ways to bring more people to the patio. They wanted a lively and welcoming spot where people could come in the evening. Additionally, with the lingering COVID-19 concerns at the time, they wanted an outdoor space where people felt safe while enjoying scheduled live music performances.

"We wanted a chilled, relaxing environment. So, we added landscaping, lighting, more seating and decided to give it a whirl," Cristina Shank said.

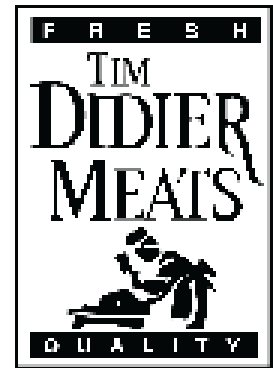
Despite initially enduring frequent cold and rainy evenings during the early spring some people eventually made their way to the Patio On Wells.

"When people come to the patio they say things like, 'We didn't know this was out here.' And, 'It's so beautiful,'" Cristina Shank said.

Besides a steadily increasing number of customers during the brief spring and summer season, the venue hosted several wedding ceremonies and graduation parties.

"We have had a lot of wedding ceremonies here," she said.

Currently, The Patio on Wells is closed for the season. They expect to reopen next spring, said an employee at Flashback Live. Flashback Live and Yolo are also co-owned by Cristina Shank.



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Filet Mignon
(4) 6 oz. or (4) 8 oz.

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WORTH THE DRIVE: The Old Train Depot

If You Go

The Old Train Depot
115 E. Market St., Pierceton

Hours:

The restaurant is closed
on Sunday and Monday.
Limited hours.
Call ahead to confirm time.

Phone: 574-594-2090

Website:

[www.facebook.com/
The-Old-Train-
Depot-123925434319572](http://www.facebook.com/The-Old-Train-Depot-123925434319572)

The Old Train Depot
now serves food and
drinks in the former
train station, built
around 1867.



Laura Weston



Laura Weston

The Heirloom
Tomato Salad has
balsamic vinegar
dressing drizzled
across it.

By LAURA WESTON

Though passenger rail service hasn't been available for years in Pierceton, you can still get your fill of railroad nostalgia along with some tasty eats.

The Old Train Depot in the Pierceton Train Station serves up food and drinks that will satisfy everyone's appetite as they also savor the railroad architecture and memorabilia.

The c.1867 train station is built of sturdy brick and has decorative brick patterns, known as corbelling, under its bracketed eaves. Large freight doors on the south side of the building dominate that facade. One of the depot's most distinctive features is the painted sign on the west side of the building that lets you know it's 351 miles to Pittsburgh.

While dining at the Old Train Depot, you'll likely be sitting in what's called the "train car," the second level of the restaurant. And there will probably be locals enjoying an after-work beer and dinner around the bar.

The menu is limited, but has good options.

The Caboose Burger comes with lots of pickles, and it is appreciated that condiments come in separate containers. It's much easier to control the amount, and you don't have to use a shared bottle.

The Mexican soup had a creamy broth that had chunky ingredients and left a little heat on the palate after eating it.

The Heirloom Tomato salad is perfect for lighter appetites. A variety of heirloom and cherry tomatoes over mixed greens and drizzled with balsamic vinaigrette hit the spot on a warm summer evening.

Our server was a one-woman band — cook, bartender and waitress. Despite her juggling many duties and people, the food and service were excellent.

In addition to the restaurant, there is a large space available for event rental. It's large enough for weddings and parties. And you might get some atmosphere from a passing freight train blasting its horn!

Be sure to watch their Facebook page for announcements about rail destination dinners in the Atlantic Coastline dining car attached to the station.

And if you want to see more rail-related architecture in Pierceton, check out the former c.1880 Flat Iron Hotel across Market Street, which has been converted to apartments.



A light gives a view of the celebration area that hosted a breakfast earlier in the day.

Lisa Esquivel Long



Lisa Esquivel Long



Laura Weston

The Old Train Depot logo reminds us of the trips by rails that Pierceton residents once took.



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MORNING, NOON & NIGHTLIFE

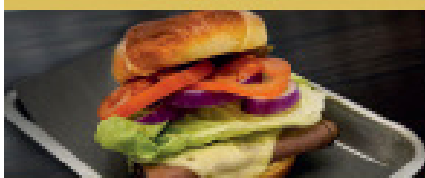
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