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Pittsburgh area filled with established, emerging restaurant rows

Pittsburgh Business Times - by [Tim Schooley](#)

So what defines a restaurant row?

It depends on who you ask.

Dianne Porter, a 30-year restaurant veteran who spent 16 years with Morton's The Steakhouse, Downtown, remembers when Walnut Street in Shadyside was a business district brimming with local bars and restaurants, such as the Raspberry Rhinoceros, the Balcony and Mardi Gras, and able to draw diners of all kinds.

"That was the street," she said.

Plenty of business districts, mostly in the city, with a few in the suburbs, can make similar claims now.

Grandview Avenue on Mount Washington continues to offer plenty of fine-dining opportunities, with restaurants such as Isabela on Grandview, LeMont, the Tin Angel and the Georgetowne Inn, among others. Carson Street on the South Side continues to offer plenty of dining options along with its collection of bars.

Downtown, Market Square is being redeveloped into an open piazza under the strategy of filling in the remaining storefronts with restaurants, while Penn Avenue in the Cultural District continues to feature thriving restaurants such as Sonoma Grille, Nine on Nine and the new Sharp Edge Bistro, among others.

Bloomfield, long anchored by a number of Italian eateries, ranks among the city's most long-standing restaurant rows.

Terri Sokoloff, a principal with **Specialty Group**, a Ross-based restaurant services firm, said larger cities are more likely to have bigger restaurant rows, while Pittsburgh's version takes about three or four in relatively close proximity. She said it's "where there's an assortment of different menus for everyone's palate."

"You can keep everybody happy," she said. "It's where you can dine, not just eat."

Sokoloff sees restaurant rows in such areas as Washington Boulevard in Mount Lebanon with restaurants like Il Pizzaiolo, Bistro 19, the Sesame Inn and Aladdin's Eatery, among others; and Aspinwall, with Mio, the Aspinwall Grille and Luma. She sees an emerging restaurant row on Butler Street in Lawrenceville, where standards such as Coca Cafe and Piccolo Forno have been joined by Tamari, **Dozen Bake Shop**, and Round Corner Cantina.

Others might include Regent Square, with restaurants such as the Square Cafe, Legume and the Green Mango Noodle Hut, among others; as well as Highland Park's Bryant Street, which is becoming a foodie enclave with new restaurants such as E2, affiliated with **Enrico Biscotti Co.**, joining standbys such as Joseph Tambellini, bakery-cooking school Food Glorious Food and the Smiling Banana Leaf.

While the recession has led to the first fallback in national restaurant sales in nearly 20 years, a recent report on independent restaurants by research firm Ibis World sees a return to growth. The 0.9 percent annual decline faced in the past five years is giving way to projected annual growth of 2.8 percent from now until 2015. Ibis expects 2010 to see a 3.8 percent growth rate.

Sokoloff has never seen new restaurant development stop in the Pittsburgh area.

"There's a lot of activity going on right now, and there's been a lot for the last couple years," she said. "If the little people have activity going on, it's a nice indicator for Pittsburgh being viable."

That's perhaps no more true than in Cranberry, where burgeoning growth has brought its share of independent operators despite increasingly high rents and having high costs for liquor licenses.

"Cranberry alone has had 12 or 15 new restaurants in the last three years," said Ron Sofranko, a restaurant entrepreneur who is a partner in a Walnut Grove restaurant in neighboring Wexford. He expects restaurant growth to continue in Cranberry.

Many have been independent. Springfield Grill, Stonepepper's Grill, Ciba and others all have thrived there.

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Joe Wojcik

Bella Vista and the Tin Angel are among a group of restaurants that sit near each other on Grandview Avenue on Mount Washington.

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