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Primanti Bros., Walnut Grove announce entrances into Mt. Lebanon

Premium content from Pittsburgh Business Times by Tim Schooley, Reporter

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Two well-known local restaurant chains, one a Pittsburgh legend, the other an up-and-comer, are preparing to set up locations in Mount Lebanon.

A few weeks after its signature product was named America's manliest sandwich by a national magazine, Primanti Bros. is now building out a former **Coldwell Banker** real estate office at 1539 Washington Road, in which it plans to open its 10th suburban location next spring.

At the same time, Walnut Grove Holdings LLC, which is building a successful local chain based on its original and now unaffiliated restaurants Walnut Grill and Shady Grove in Shadyside, has all but inked a final deal to establish a restaurant in the 6,000-square-foot location on Washington Boulevard now occupied by the Irish pub Molly Brannigans, which is expected to close soon. It, too, plans a spring opening.

Representatives for both restaurants expressed a longtime interest in establishing themselves in the affluent South Hills suburb.

"It was always in the back of our mind for years," said [Michael Kratsas](#), who handles development for Primanti Bros., whose administrative offices are based on the South Side. "Then something

popped up and we were able to make it work.”

[Kirk Vogel](#), a principal of Walnut Grove, which operates restaurants in O’Hara Township and Wexford, said his group has been eyeing a location in the South Hills for three years now.

“We like Mount Lebanon for a bunch of reasons,” said Vogel, praising the community’s suburban qualities as well as the urban feel of its business district. “It has all the demographics that fit our model. It also puts us in a position where we could go further south and not be too close to one another.”

Vogel said the new restaurant, which will be the first Walnut Grove to redevelop an established building, excluding the Shadyside operations, will invest \$650,000 to adapt the Mount Lebanon site to the look and feel of its Wexford and O’Hara locations.

Walnut Grove will find itself in the middle of Mount Lebanon’s main business district and other restaurants like Bistro 19, Luma and Il Pizzaiolo, Vogel said.

“It’s more of a walking neighborhood, and people don’t concern themselves much with parking,” he said. “It’s like a really, really big neighborhood.”

Primanti takes over a 4,700-plus square foot location closer to the Galleria in a space whose origins date back to the 1930s, when it was the Lebanon Lodge, followed later by Bimbo’s and Froggy’s Roadhouse.

[Gary Wilson](#), a principal of Downtown-based Langholz Wilson Ellis Inc., who represented the seller, described Primanti as the right kind of operator to take over a location with such a dining tradition.

Kratsas said Primanti is working to convert the location to preserve and maintain the original lodge-style design of the restaurant property. He has every reason to expect Primanti to succeed in Mount Lebanon after a township official jokingly banged his gavel and said, “approved,” after Kratsas said little more than who he was representing at a recent public meeting for the new restaurant.

[Terri Sokoloff](#), a principal of **Specialty Group**, a Ross-based restaurant services firm, expects Primanti to succeed wherever it goes. But she believes Walnut Grove might face challenges as it works to acclimate what was developed as a ground-up, suburban-scale restaurant into an in-line storefront in a traditional business district.

She understands the desire for restaurants to be in Mount Lebanon, though, noting the community’s affluence and the wide-ranging tastes of its diners.

“I think it’s a great dining district,” she said. “You have a lot of people who appreciate different types of food out there.”

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