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# Restaurateur quickly applies for Bellevue liquor license

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John Heller/Post-Gazette

Grille 565 owner Mark Helbling, sitting outside his restaurant on Lincoln Avenue, is the first person to apply for an alcohol permit in Bellevue.

By Bill Toland / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Passers-by on Lincoln Avenue in Bellevue were greeted by an unfamiliar sight Wednesday — a bright orange poster in a restaurant window, signifying a new liquor license application.

The application, submitted on behalf of Grille 565, was filed just hours after the polls closed Tuesday in Bellevue, where residents overwhelmingly approved a referendum allowing by-the-glass beer and liquor sales for the first time in nearly 80 years.

“If we are fortunate enough to get approved, we want to set an example” to those who are skeptical of inviting bars into the business district, said Mark Helbling, owner of the building that

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houses Grille 565 and its lower-level music venue, 565Live. (The restaurant itself is owned by Gary Cirlingione, Jennifer Cirlingione and Mike Welsh.)

Mr. Helbling also wanted the restaurant, open since last summer, to be first in line for a license. Bellevue is guaranteed just two bar licenses by virtue of its population, about 8,300.

Any other licenses would have to be screened and approved by Bellevue's borough council. The first two, though, circumvent the inter-municipal transfer approval process.

And generally, the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board will consider those applications on a first-come, first-served basis.

"We had the [Grille 565] application in the package, standing by the FedEx box," said Ned Sokoloff, president of Specialty Group, a hospitality industry brokerage and consultant.

A PLCB spokeswoman said the state agency must receive certified election results before it can process license applications from Allegheny County's formerly dry towns.

Wilksburg also voted Tuesday to end decades of dry status. None of the borough's restaurants were immediately prepared to submit a license application, said Marlee Gallagher, communications and outreach coordinator at Wilksburg Community Development Corp.

"The next couple months, but not tomorrow," she said Wednesday. Wilksburg is guaranteed at least five licenses.

Should he receive a license, Mr. Helbling said the restaurant would need to be renovated to accommodate a bar space. He said shifting attitudes and changing demographic helped this referendum succeed by a 2-1 margin; in 2011, the measure in Bellevue lost by fewer than 100 votes.

"The population has changed a little. More young people have moved in," he said. "People want a place to go in their own town."

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