

Lawrenceville's Coca Cafe for sale

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By Dan Gigler / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Coca Cafe, one of the businesses that was an early part of the reinvention of modern Lawrenceville, is for sale.

“I got a little emotional today,” Carrie Rudolph said. “It wasn’t an easy decision to come to, but we’ve been there for nearly 20 years and have had this itchy feeling for a while, that it's time for the artists to move on,” she said regarding the demographic shift in the neighborhood, which over the last two decades has transitioned from blue collar to an artists enclave to a high-priced yuppie destination.

“It was very artsy and then everybody else came in — the condos and the tech people. It’s not that it's not great. It is. But seeing that turnover happening made me think it’s time to make a name somewhere else.”

Ms. Rudolph and partners Melanie Ritchey and Jared Marran took over in 2003 what was a coffee shop/gallery at 3811 Butler St. in Lower Lawrenceville, started by Janice Webb Donatelli. The new team expanded Coca Cafe to become a full-service restaurant, and they gained a fervent following for their daily breakfasts and weekend brunches. They also did small plate dinners on the weekends.

Since the COVID-19 restrictions imposed on restaurants in mid-March, Ms. Rudolph has done some takeout business on a small scale and may continue to do so, but said she does not intend to reopen as before, even after restaurants are allowed to open again.

“Of course this doesn’t help,” she said of the worldwide novel coronavirus pandemic. “But it also was not the deciding factor.

“I love owning my own business and being an entrepreneur, and it's well worth it, but there was definitely a realization recently that I was happier not going to work, and that maybe we stayed a little too long.”

This business is being listed by the Specialty Group based in Ross. The 1,300-square-foot restaurant seats approximately 50 guests with a small outdoor seating area and full kitchen, coffee bar and basement. The sale includes the furniture, fixtures, equipment and liquor license. No asking price was given, but the agency said in a release that it is open to negotiation.

“Lawrenceville is great, and the people treated us great. We made a long run of it. I’m really proud of what we did here,” she said. “But I think Colorado has my name on it. I love Pittsburgh. My family is here and it’s home, and I will always come back. But I’ve always wanted to live somewhere else, and I’m ready for a change.”

Dan Gigler: dgigler@post-gazette.com; Twitter [@gigs2312](https://twitter.com/gigs2312)