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## Restaurant group scouts second downtown location

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With his company's first restaurant here opened only a few weeks, Joe Lanni and his Cincinnati-based Thunderdome Restaurant Group are scouting for a 5,000-square-foot space downtown in which to open a second.

After the company debuted its Outlaw Country-themed Mexican restaurant Bakersfield on Penn Avenue in the Cultural District a few weeks ago, Thunderdome now is working to bring its Eagle Food and Beer Hall restaurant downtown.

"We know that Pittsburgh is an awesome market," said Lanni, adding Thunderdome had already begun scouting for another restaurant location before Bakersfield opened here.

Taking its name from a former post office building in which the first restaurant opened anchors sides m



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The original location for the Eagle Food and Beer Hall in Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood .

Thunderdome opened the first Eagle in 2013 and followed with a second in Indianapolis, with restaurants also in the works for Louisville and Columbus.

“It’s fun. It’s at a great price point. The chicken is out of this world,” said Lanni. “It’s a good compliment to Bakersfield.”

Michelle Stewart of Colliers International is representing Thunderdome in its search after helping the company secure its location for Bakersfield next to Siena Mercato in the 900 block of Penn Avenue.

Lanni said Thunderdome is negotiating over two potential locations in his bid to establish a single spot here for Eagle. He hopes to have a lease signed in the next four or five months and to debut Eagle Food and Beer Hall in Pittsburgh some time next year in a restaurant expected to employ about 75.

Thunderdome has been expanding aggressively.

Downtown’s dining scene is booming as well, with the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership recently reporting that 55 restaurants have opened in the golden triangle since just 2014.

Focusing largely on bringing new restaurants concepts into downtowns, Thunderdome now operates about 30 restaurants, mostly through Bakersfield, a better burger concept called Krueger’s Tavern, a burrito restaurant called Currito.

Lanni sees downtowns as the place to be, whether here, Cincinnati or in other Midwest metros.

“We’re seeing this in downtowns all over the Midwest and other areas,” he said. “People are just really interested in getting back downtown and exploring some of these cool old buildings.”

Terri Sokoloff, a principal with Ross-based Specialty Group, a restaurant services firm, sees downtown as vibrant right now, although she sees the possibility of dining saturation if the residential population doesn’t keep up with the number of new places to eat.

But she also sees the prospect for Eagle Food and Beer Hall to enter the market as fried chicken enjoys a moment as a hot food trend nationwide.

“Timing wise, it’s definitely a winner,” she said, adding the business advantages to be had of the poultry mainstay. “Chicken is very affordable. So there’s going to be a higher profit margin with that.”

**Tim Schooley**

Reporter

*Pittsburgh Business Times*

