

# Isabela, Dunning's Grill to close

Restaurant owners both plan on retiring

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- By Melissa McCart and Katie Sarandou

Pending retirements by two restaurant owners are leading to the closures of popular dining spots on Mount Washington and in Regent Square.

Isabela on Grandview will be closing at the end of the month. Owner of the building, George Merrick, 81, is ready to retire and to dedicate time to his wife, who has been ill.

“What other 80-year-old do you know who’s running a restaurant?” Mr. Merrick told the PostGazette when the building went up for sale last May. Since then, two closings have fallen through.

President of Specialty Bar & Restaurant Brokers, Terri Sokoloff will continue to handle the sale of the building, which is available with or without the business assets. It includes an adjacent parcel to the building that opens the potential for expansion or redevelopment, she said.

Isabela on Grandview opened in 2000. “I’m so grateful to my wonderful employees, family, friends and loyal patrons who have made the experience of running Isabela unforgettable,” Mr. Merrick said in the press release. He hopes to see as many customers as he can in the next two weeks, “so I can thank them for their patronage personally.”

In Regent Square, Dunning’s Grill will close Saturday.

“I’ve been here for 32 years, and I’ve been in this business for 44 years, and it’s time for me to retire,” said owner George Smith, 64, of Point Breeze. He added that with his three sons all in their 20s, it felt like the right time.

The restaurant has served as a family gathering place and neighborhood bar since it opened in 1983

at the corner of South Braddock Avenue and Hutchinson Street in the heart of Regent Square’s business district.

On its final day of business, the restaurant, originally called Dunning McNair’s Ale House after the prominent Irishman and founder of Wilkinsburg, Col. Dunning McNair, will sell only its two most popular dishes: the chicken salad and the hamburger.

“We’ll probably close the kitchen early and have a few beers,” Mr. Smith said.

Dunning's Grill is the second Regent Square restaurant to close recently, after the Italian restaurant Cibo shut its doors earlier this year. The neighborhood is made up of Wilksburg, Swissvale, Edgewood and the City of Pittsburgh.

Mr. Smith said the building housing Dunning's Grill was purchased by Jimmy Brown and will reopen later this year as a restaurant called ease. This will continue the building's legacy of food service, which in the past included Charlie's TenCent Saloon (which it housed when Mr. Smith bought the building), and a restaurant called The Derby before that.

The unofficial Facebook page for Dunning's Grill, cluttered with comments from nostalgic patrons and photos of families eating their last dinners at the restaurant, serves as a testimony to its years of service to the community.

"It's been like St. Patrick's Day every night for the past two weeks since I put the [closing] sign out," Mr. Smith said. "When I first started kids would come in, and now they have their own kids and they bring them here. It's really neat."