

Northern Colorado BUSINESS REPORT

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Stonehouse to become Beach House

By Staff

FORT COLLINS - On July 11, the Stonehouse Grille in Fort Collins will close and begin a three-week transformation from a Scottish sports pub into a beach bar and restaurant. From Burns to Buffet, as it were.

Stonehouse owners Scott Kintz and Kit Sutherland have struck a deal with Steve Lauer, a major franchiser for Subway and Qdoba shops in Northern Colorado, and business partner Ron Ritter to fill the 10,000-square-foot space at 125 S. College Ave. with The Beach House, built around five distinctly different dining areas. Kintz and Sutherland will continue to own the building.

"Last year, Kit and I were thinking about where we wanted to concentrate our energies," said Kintz, who also has an interest in several quick-lube automotive shops in Longmont and Windsor. "As my grandfather used to say, we were 'going 14 ways from Sunday'; we needed to make some decisions."

There were some additional complications, aside from the fact that 2009 was a terrible year for all restaurants.

"We thought that as much as we loved having the restaurant, maybe 10,000 square feet wasn't the best size for our Scottish pub/sports bar concept," Kintz explained. "We talked with Nick (Christensen) and Ryan (Schaefer) at Chrisland and told them if someone had a good concept that needed our space, we would consider becoming just landlords and getting out of the restaurant business."

Lauer had a concept in mind - and also happened to be working with Christensen and Schaefer.

"I had been thinking about developing a fully themed beach bar and restaurant," Lauer said. "I wanted to create an environment that would remind people of the best beach vacation they had ever had: in Cabo, the Caribbean or Hawaii. This space looked perfect."

Kintz and Sutherland had one condition before the deal could go through.

"We needed to be sure that our staff was welcome to continue working there," Kintz said. "You hear stories of staff arriving at work to find a 'Closed' sign on the door. We weren't going to do that."

For Lauer, keeping the existing staff, chef and manager on the payroll while they train in the new concept was no sacrifice.

"I opened my first Subway shop in Fort Collins when I was 20," he said. "Since then, I have owned probably 55 restaurants, all fast-food. (A full-service restaurant) is a new animal for me. I'm lucky to have such great people working for me."

After the conclusion of the World Cup Tournament, the Stonehouse will say "Ae fareweel, alas, for ever!" On Aug. 1, the Beach House will open its big new doors.

"We are extending the patio inside, the first of five themed spaces," Lauer said. "One of the first things you will see is the tortilla machine turning out warm tortillas for the fish tacos. The menu will feature tortas - a Mexican sandwich - shrimp, fish and other items you would expect to find at a beach restaurant."

The drink list will include tropical smoothies and shakes, both virgin and non. Downstairs are dining areas and the Cabo Cantina. Upstairs will feature Adirondack chairs (kid sizes available) and a space to play cornhole, a beanbag toss game.

"We want people to relax and stay a little longer than they usually do at a restaurant," Lauer said. "We're going to have music: steel band and reggae and lots of other kinds. Every month we will have a full-moon party. And if we can figure out a way to add some sweet salt air to the atmosphere, we will do that, too."

Because opening a restaurant fulfilled a long-held dream for Kintz, letting go of the Stonehouse Grille is a little

bittersweet.

"But change is good," he said. "We want to see Old Town thrive. As building owners, we think we have found the right person to help that happen."