

Stonehouse to trade kilts for beach duds

Restaurant to get new owners, theme

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The owner of a new restaurant that will replace Stonehouse Grille in Old Town said eating at his "Mexican-Caribbean-style" restaurant will feel like stepping into a Corona beer commercial.

Northern Colorado Subway and Qdoba franchise owner Steve Lauer has taken about 50 trips to Mexico and the Caribbean, and each time he loves soaking up the laid-back environment.

And Lauer's Beach House Grill will transport that environment to Fort Collins.

"I've been kicking this around the last few years. I don't know that I would have done this at any other location than Stonehouse," Lauer said.

Stonehouse, which opened in 2005, will close July 11, as the FIFA World Cup comes to a close. Lauer will start construction July 12 on the property at 125 S. College Ave. He plans to be open for business by Aug. 1.

Stonehouse Grille owners Scott Kintz and Kit Sutherland said in the past year they have been looking for a potential tenant to take the 10,000-square-foot property off their hands so they could focus on their other business ventures. When Lauer proposed the concept for Beach House Grill, they agreed to lease the property to him.

"It's not that we were not happy with Stonehouse. We were straddling a lot of different businesses and felt the need for growth," said Sutherland. "I think it will be a great concept. It's not just another Mexican restaurant."

Lauer, who will lease the space from Kintz and Sutherland, plans to transform the Stonehouse into an open and airy restaurant with a "beach house" feel to it.

In what Lauer describes as a Margaritaville-style restaurant he plans to have a rooftop bar complete with Adirondack chairs and buckets of beer.

Inside, he intends to open some of the front windows to expand the open air feel and add Caribbean-style decor, including a 300-gallon fish tank. Other plans include enlarging the bar to include a smoothie and margarita area.

The restaurant will even have lockers where customers can leave their shorts and flip-flops so they can change into them during the winter, Lauer said.

The menu will consist of "Mexican Caribbean" food such as shrimp, fish, chicken and beef tacos, along with tortas and fish. Drinks will range from pina colodas to Miami vices.

Lauer plans to create an environment that the whole family will enjoy.

"One thing we want to create is this is a place you can go if you are 5 years old or 50 years old," he said. "It's the right fit and right niche."

Kintz and Sutherland said it would be sad to say goodbye to Stonehouse but noted they may reopen the restaurant in the future at a smaller location in Fort Collins.

"We have enjoyed the Stonehouse; it's been a great venture," said Kintz, who said the restaurant sales were flat in 2009 and on the rise in 2010. He made it clear the reason they were closing the Stonehouse

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was to focus on their other business — Oil Can Henry's oil change shops.

"We were not actively looking to exit, an opportunity presented itself," Kintz said.

Nick Christensen, president of Chrisland Inc., was the matchmaker who put the former clients in touch with each other.

Kintz and Sutherland will remain landlords in the deal as Lauer leases the building for his new restaurant concept. While Christensen would not disclose the terms of the lease, he said Chrisland acted as an adviser in a brokerage capacity for the deal.

Lauer said he will keep the entire Stonehouse staff onboard for the transition, and may need to hire 20 more employees.



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The Stonehouse Grille, 125 S. College Ave., will close its doors July 11 and will reopen at the beginning of August as a Caribbean-style eatery. (Coloradoan library)

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