

BUSINESS

WATERLOO CHRONICLE

Honkey tonk brews

Chainsaw brings the beer hall to King Street with a southern twang

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With a street-side patio, cold beer and time-honoured tunes, it has long been a hot spot for uptown bar goers.

Now the re-named an re-born Chainsaw is ready to welcome back those legions of loyal patrons.

The bar formerly known as the Sliver Spur shut its doors earlier this summer and its taps have been dry ever since.

That was until Tuesday when the revamped “southern beer hall” opened its doors back up under the new ownership of Waterloo businessman, Ryan Good.

“I wanted to leverage a southern, country, small-town beer hall look,” said Good. “Sort of that old-style of doing things. I wanted to make sure it fit with that trend of — you walk into the old country bar and the jukebox is playing and everyone is wearing jeans and there’s a neon Budweiser sign above the bar.”

On the surface, it may not sound like much of a departure from the old Spur. But Good has shaken up the business in the short time he had to turn the project around.

Gone are the old, fast food style tables on the patio and the well-worn, simple railing. In their place are brand new picnic benches and a sleek-looking enclosure.

With only a short time frame to work with Good had to rein in his improvements. He decided to keep the same atmosphere, but implement some much-needed updates like new draft lines and improvements to the kitchen.

“We opened it up and cleaned it up,” he said.

“But, we kept a lot of the look and feel. For example, people have notched stuff out of the wood, and that’s part of it — part of the character. The wood has this patina from all of the grease and the dirt, but that’s part of the character of the rough-cut pine.”

The project is a first for Good, who may be new to the bar game, but is already a veteran in the business world.

He worked as a chef for 10 years before, during and after the time he spent working on an environmental studies degree at the University of Waterloo. Life in the kitchen wasn’t the future he saw for himself, so Good diversified into other businesses. He managed a mechanical company, ran a business



Chainsaw owner Ryan Good left, and manager Paul Boudreau stand on the bar’s renovated patio. The popular nightspot re-opened this week under new ownership with a southern country theme, a new menu and cold beer on tap.

PHOTO MELINDA DALTON

selling medical equipment and eventually got into the real estate marketing game.

Good and two other partners bought the local PropertyGuys.com franchise almost three years ago. The business helps owners sell their home privately.

“It’s running itself now,” Good said. “It’s successful and we’re happy with it. I was looking for another project to start and this presented itself, so I took it on.”

Part of what appealed to him about the Chainsaw project was its timeline. The property owner is planning on redeveloping the site in a few years. That short duration fit in with Good’s business style and he decided to take the bar on and have it up and running by back to school time.

“This is perfect for me,” he said. “I don’t want to be a bar owner for a long time. I have two kids and it will take its toll, I’m sure.”

In addition to the physical changes to the bar, Good has made some alterations to the way they’ll do business. He has re-jigged the menu, opting out of the usual “freezer to fryer” bar food in favor of a limited selection of hyper-fresh items.

They’ll have one large-portioned meal available for the day and when it’s gone, it’s gone.

“It’s going to be cheap and very good,” he said.

“The margins on all the stuff we do are low and the way we’re going to make money is volume. Especially at this time with the economy, it’s the perfect time because everyone is looking for good value in their food and their drink.”

The entertainment at Chainsaw will also change. While the karaoke that was a fixture at the Spur will still be around, Good has pulled it back to three nights a week to make

room for live country acts.

To further add to the atmosphere, the bar will be serving beer at a cheap price out of mason jars, he said.

While the area isn’t starved for country bars, two popular ones already exist in Kitchener, Good said he doesn’t see them as competition.

“If anything, they’re good for me because they have created awareness around country,” he said. “We’re all building the brand of country. Students have become very enamored by country and now they don’t have to spend \$15 on a cab to get down there.”

Good is banking on those student dollars and the former popularity of the Spur to make Chainsaw a success. While he welcomes the business, he said he also acknowledges problems that arose at the property in its former life.

“We’re going to run it as a very tight ship,” he said.

“I plan on having one of the best security teams in the town and we’re going to make sure this is a safe and fun place to be.

“We’re going to be highly respectful of our neighbours. I live in the uptown core. I’ve been woken up many times days in a row and I know what that’s like.”

The bar held its first “soft opening” on Tuesday and plans on ramping up the entertainment listings as the start of the school year draws closer.

Longtime patrons of the Spur are eager to make their way back and Good is anxious to get the ball rolling on his first foray into the world of bar ownership.

He may not have much experience in the role, but given the goodwill surrounding the bar, the location and the changes he’s implemented, Chainsaw’s owner said he’s confident the business will be a success.

“My philosophy on business is you can do any business, it doesn’t matter what your skill level is, as long as you get the right people in the right positions,” he said.

“That’s something I’m good at. I may not have run a bar before, but I know how to get the right team together and a business is only as good as its team.

“That’s why I’ve got a lot of confidence in this. People say, ‘Are you crazy? You’ve never run a bar before, let alone something like this.’

“But I’ve got a great management team, I’ve got great security. I’ve got everyone in place.”