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## New on the suburban scene

### The buzz on new and coming-soon restaurants in the 'burbs

By Lisa Arnett  
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Caprese salad with mozzarella balloon at Gaetano's

Beloved Forest Park restaurant **La Piazza** has closed, but Chef Gaetano de Benedetto plans to open **Gaetano's** nearby, potentially as early as dinner service **March 28**. De Benedetto tells us that La Piazza grew too large for his taste after its expansion. "It was huge and it didn't make any sense for me. It was like a factory," he says. So this spot -- which he's the sole owner of -- will top out at 60 seats. Though he'll still proffer a few La Piazza favorites, like his gorgonzola-shrimp puff pastry and chicken cooked under a brick, he plans to morph the menu often based on what he picks up at the local market. Heck, he'll even keep tofu in stock so he can whip up a vegan degustation, if that's what you fancy.

#### Barleycorn in the 'burbs

The first suburban outpost of **John Barleycorn** debuted on Friday with what looked like all of **Schaumburg** there to celebrate, from ready-to-party post-grads to unwinding-after-work dudes in matching corporate polos. **This place can only be described as huge:** It's a two-story brick behemoth plopped down on the corner of American Lane and National Parkway just west of Woodfield Mall, so new you can still spot plenty of construction fencing and dirt piles throughout the lot. The main floor is split into a bar and a dining room; head up an grand staircase near the back and you'll see a huge dance floor bordered by three bars, a stage and a **dozen booths decked out for bottle**

#### service.

**We stopped in on opening night** and found that service was, well, pretty messy. Bodyguard-like dudes stood in front of every exit, but not one of them even blinked when a bread basket caught on fire at a nearby table and a busboy carried it, flaming, across the dining room to the kitchen. We felt a little sorry for our clueless server, who couldn't have gotten enough training if she barely knew what beers were on tap, the difference between the three different kinds of fries offered, and whether or not the bar could make a cosmo. So, suburbanites: **We want to know what you think.** Was your experience anything like ours? Ready to make JB your regular hang once the kinks are worked out? Would you get bottle service in Schaumburg, or do you just want knock back a couple beers? **Be among the first to post your own review.**

#### Sweet stuff in Naperville

Some attention-getting chains have opened outposts in the new Freedom Commons complex located near I-88 and Freedom Boulevard in **Naperville**. Check out the recently opened **Morton's Steakhouse** as well as **White Chocolate Grill**, an upscale eatery with current locations in Phoenix and Las Vegas. Menu highlights range from tomato-gin soup and a spit-roasted turkey French dip sandwich to crab-topped mahi mahi. And with a name like that, we expect some **killer desserts** -- luckily, though the dessert menu is brief, it delivers with picks such as white-chocolate raspberry cheesecake, white-chocolate banana cream pie with graham-cracker crust and French white-chocolate bread pudding (all \$7.50).

#### A chic post-movie stop in Warrenville

**Spats**, a new bar near AMC Cantera theater, will offer movie-goers a post-show landing pad that's a touch more sophisticated than, say, nearby Buffalo Wild Wings or Rock Bottom, with a modernized Prohibition-era theme. It opened its doors in soft-opening mode **March 6**. High-top tables and a long bar back-lit in changing colors contribute to the chic surrounds, and live music -- from **dueling pianos** to **jazz bands** -- will be a staple on Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday nights. **Click here for our recent review.**

#### More to nosh on in Geneva

We just got wind from the owners over at hip brunch cafe **Nosh** that in **April**, they'll be adding Friday night dinners to their usual lineup of breakfast and lunch. And though the weather hardly seems cooperative now,

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**First Look: Sopa**  
 This polished North Shore newbie is one to watch

they're also planning to debut courtyard seating and a refreshed spring/summer menu in **May**.

#### Brunch in FRG

Cute and contemporary **Brunch Cafe** opened its doors in February in Fox River Grove, filling the void in these parts for breakfast that's a bit more updated than your neighborhood pancake house. You'll find plenty of breakfast basics, but we're more drawn to the decadent twists on the staples, like white chocolate-raspberry waffles, tiramisu blintzes, Nutella and pecan-stuffed crepes and pancake flights. Savory options include an avocado-topped breakfast quesadilla, sausage patty sliders and potato skins filled with scrambled eggs, ham, peppers and cheddar cheese. The only thing missing is a mimosa or bloody mary, but sadly, there's no liquor served here. Libations are limited to coffee, tea, cappuccino and juices.

#### Union opens in Evanston

**Union Pizzeria** has had Evanstonians buzzing since its opening in late February. Housed in a stunning historic building that used to be a car showroom, glassy floor-to-ceiling windows fill the space where garage doors once stood. We love how this place looks like a converted loft, with cracked walls revealing bits of exposed brick and an impressively high arched ceiling criss-crossed with wooden beams. The centerpiece of the semi-open kitchen is a massive wood-burning soapstone oven, fired up to 750 degrees to cook rustic pizzas with toppings like lamb sausage and eggplant. The staff dubs the pies "neo-Neopolitan" in style; they're made with a double-zero grade organic flour -- so fine it's almost talc-like, we're told -- but don't feature the wet center that traditional Neopolitan pies have. Along with a collection of hot and cold small plates (Note: they're pretty small) the menu also features one larger "daily plate," ranging from duck ragout with polenta to semolina gnocchi to lasagna. Between the dining room, a 25-seat bar and a lounge-y couch-filled area near the entrance, the whole place seats around 100. **We dine there recently and pitted it against nearby spot Omaggio. [Click here to see how they measured up.](#)**

#### Jerry's opens in Winnetka

Chic catering and private party venue **Corner Cooks** expanded next door to open **Jerry's**, a contemporary American spot. The daytime menu is short and sweet, tailored for the ladies-who-lunch crowd, while the dinner menu is all about whimsical, sharable options. "It's fun to taste lots of different stuff," says owner Betsy Simson, who named the spot after her dad Jerry. "It's not fun to get one heavy thing and be stuck eating it all." Sharable eats include a shrimp lollipop with sweet chili sauce, salmon-avocado sashimi tucked into wonton cups and a daily risotto "bomb." The mini desserts (dubbed "sweet plates by the taste") are a brilliant idea: They range from an apple sachet with caramel sauce to a spoonful of creme brulee to strawberries with bittersweet chocolate fondue, and cost just \$2 or \$3 a pop -- or \$18 to sample the entire lineup.

#### Retro eats in Lombard

It seems like we've been waiting *forever* for Jason Paskewitz to open **Jackson Park Bar and Grill**, his massive Beaux-Arts inspired restaurant in the city. So what's he been up to while the construction crawls in River North? Launching **The 621 Diner**, an old-school Route 66 truck stop-inspired diner miles away in **Lombard**, that's what. This retro diner offers all-day breakfast and classics like patty melts, meatloaf and fried chicken.

#### End of the Abbey

Popular wine bar **Oak Park Abbey** closed March 1. Owner Ellen Bettenhausen tells us she sold off the lease and is keeping her future plans under wraps for the time being, though we may see her resurface elsewhere with a new spot. In its place, keep your eyes peeled for **Velvet Rope**, a small-plates spot that landed its liquor license earlier this year.

#### Courtright's revamps in Willow Springs

This southwest suburban stalwart getting a menu makeover from new chef Ryan McCaskey, who's had a busy career at spots such as **Vivere**, **Tizi Melloul** and Rushmore downtown, plus stints at Trio and **Tru**. You probably know this elegant spot for those once-a-year special occasion feasts, but with a more contemporary menu and experimental dishes, McCaskey hopes diners will return seasonally to see what he's up to. His new menu debuting in mid-February features fun creations such as inverted ravioli molded from tuna and stuffed with truffled white bean puree, udon noodles pressed out of apple cider and lamb served with Cryovac-compressed winter melons.

#### Irish invades Highwood

After months of construction and a few delays, new Irish pub and restaurant **Bridie McKenna's** opened in early 2007 in downtown **Highwood**. This sizeable spot boasts soccer-airing TVs, a fireplace-outfitted library room, two bars and plenty of ornate woodwork. Expect plenty of Irish and English brews on tap (and more than 25 domestic and imported bottles behind the bar) to complement a hearty menu of Irish specialties and eclectic American eats.

### COMING SOON

#### Soul sets a date...and delays...in Clarendon Hills

Howard Davis (owner of city spots **Marche** and **Gioco**) has partnered with **Le Lan's** Bill Kim to open **Soul** in downtown Clarendon Hills. Taking on the executive chef role is **Karen Nicolas**, who tells us Soul is now hoping for a **grand opening in late April**. Aiming to strike a balance between casual and fine dining, this two-level restaurant takes a cue from its location across from the Metra station in downtown Clarendon Hills. Just as the train rails stretch across the country, says Nicolas, so will the regional American menu, featuring pork and lamb racks, pot pie, cornbread-stuffed quail and her take on clam chowder, says Nicolas. The metaphor is kinda cheesy, but admittedly, the food sounds just plain good. She's also working on a bar menu of all-under-\$15 eats and a collection of American artisanal cheeses. Expect updated spins on classic American drinks, like the mint julep and iced tea, plus a decent list of American craft beers.

#### French brasserie in the works in Northfield

**Hausmann Brasserie**, a new **Northfield** spot from restaurateur Jacky Pluton (He ran self-titled Pluton downtown a few years back, plus **Jacky's Bistro** in Evanston) is aiming for a **April 21** opening. Though the



#### First Look: Fahrenheit

This stunning suburban newcomer turns up the heat



#### Brunch in the 'burbs

From fancy French toast to >>

name smacks of a traditional French spot, purists should take note that the concept is tweaked a bit: traditional French classics with American influence from Thomas Rice, who'll preside over the kitchen here. This space on Happ Road has sat vacant for about a year, and was formerly home to Brasserie T and MK North; those who remember the cavernous look of those restaurants will hardly recognize the revamped space, which will sport a more intimate feel with a lower ceiling, carpeted floors and banquette seating aplenty.

#### Israeli eats in Highland Park

When we heard about [Mizrahi Grill](#) opening in mid-March, our first instinct was that, somehow, designer extraordinaire Isaac Mizrahi had taken a leap into the restaurant industry. Alas, no, Isaac here. This kosher restaurant owned by husband-and-wife team Eli and Melissa Mizrahi will tackle Middle-Eastern favorites such as falafel, hummus, kabobs and goulash.

#### Sparkling addition to Burr Ridge

[Topaz](#), a contemporary seafood and steak spot from the owners of American grill [Amber](#) in downtown Westmont, aims to open in **April** in **Burr Ridge**. Also in Burr Ridge, popular Orland Park winery restaurant [Cooper's Hawk](#) has opened a [second location](#). Owner Tim McEnery tells us that the expansion has doubled the local winery's production, and that they're looking to open a third location in **Wheeling**, potentially in summer 2008.

### NEWS BITES

#### Closings, moves & other whisperings

[New Rebozo](#) in Oak Park is now open after being closed for remodeling.

Italian deli [L'Appetito](#) in **Glenview** has morphed into [Trattoria Belluno](#), a full-service eatery serving family recipes. For more on the hearty menu, [click here](#).

#### Cucina Paradiso reopens in Oak Park

After a cigarette tossed in a nearby dumpster sent the kitchen up in flames this past June, [Cucina Paradiso](#) has reopened in **Oak Park**, with a completely gutted interior and a revamped menu. Returning regulars will notice two tweaks to the menu: smaller-sized pasta portions in addition to their usual enormous full sizes, and a super-reasonably priced small plates menu with eats such as zucchini fritters and pistachio-crust chicken skewers (\$5; \$3 on Tuesday nights in the bar only).

#### Fahrenheit adds lunch in St. Charles

Arguably the suburbs' most anticipated fine-dining debuts in 2007, [Fahrenheit](#) in **St. Charles** recently added lunch to its offerings. We've psyched for a more affordable taste of chef Pete Balodimas' organic produce, game and seafood -- for example, if you can't justify \$28 for the pork belly dinner entree, you can still get a taste with the \$12 pork belly sandwich at lunchtime. For more, check out:

>>[Our opening week experience](#)

>>[Tribune critic Phil Vettel's review](#)

>>Our [Q&A with this down-to-earth chef](#) to hear how he got his start in the dining biz...and why he *can't* tell you what's on his iPod playlist.

#### International additions in Geneva

**Geneva's** main strip has welcomed some internationally inflected newbies this winter. [Sergio's Cantina](#) proffers authentic Mexican eats in the long-vacant Potter's Place space. Formerly located in downtown **St. Charles**, [Bistro Thai](#), popped up down the river on Geneva's main strip in early December. Here you'll find the same made-to-order traditional Thai cuisine in a chic bistro atmosphere, complete with lantern-like globe lights, modern furniture and an eye-catching, wave-like lighting sculpture covering the ceiling.

#### Sopa spices up Highwood

The North Shore is jam-packed with white tableclothed fine dining destinations, but two talents from Winnetka's well-known spot [Restaurant Michael](#) have set out on their own with the more casual, upbeat [Sopa](#), which opened quietly Dec. 4 in **Highwood**. Mediterranean comfort food is the name of the game, with homey pasta dishes and inventive Italian- and French-inspired dishes. [Check out our first look for more](#).

#### If you build it, they will come

>>We've spotted some in-the-works shopping complexes in the northwest 'burbs -- and we all know that means new restaurants are on the way, too. Fieldstone Place is in its super-early stages (as in, there's just a sign there) between Schick and Army Trail Roads in **Bartlett**. Moving along at a faster pace is [The Arboretum of South Barrington](#), a strip mall of upscale retailers and an outpost of Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, aiming to open in **Fall 2008** at Barrington and Higgins Roads.

**Have you heard something we haven't?** [Tell us about your favorite new \(or old!\) spots for eating and drinking](#).

*Metromix special contributor Terri Mooney contributed to this story.*

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