Written by MARK JAEGER
Wednesday, 14 November 2012 17:06

Well-traveled owner excited by buzz business has stirred before opening

Mike Tsuchihashi only had to go as far as the nearest computer to get an inkling of how anxious people are for the opening of his new Grafton restaurant, Atlas BBQ.

“It was taking a bit of a chance to set up a Facebook page before the restaurant opened, so I begged family members and friends to ‘like’ us,” Tsuchihashi said.

With little more than a week before the restaurant opens in the former Paramount Grille & Bakehouse, 1304 12th Ave., Tsuchihashi said the digital community is already buzzing.

The eatery has 525 Facebook “likes.”

A grand opening is planned for Monday, Nov. 26, although Tsuchihashi said he intends to follow a slow, deliberate approach in developing the restaurant — much like the directions for making a delectable barbecue.

“We want to make sure whatever we do, we do it right,” he said.

That means lunch and carry-out service will be added gradually, but dinner will be the first offering.

Tsuchihashi has long dreamt about owning his own restaurant, leaving a job as food and beverage manager at Potawatami Bingo and Casino in Milwaukee to pursue that quest.

“I was manager at the casino for 11 years. After seeing it through a $120 million expansion in 2000 and then a $240 million expansion in 2008, I had pretty much done all I could there,” he said.

Tsuchihashi left Potawatami in February of 2011 and began to formalize plans for his own restaurant.

His diverse background and lifelong interest in food dovetailed nicely into planning for the business.

Tsuchihashi was born in New York, spent much of his childhood in the Netherlands and returned to the States to live in Texas, where he completed high school.

He then studied culinary science at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, R.I. Tsuchihashi spent six years working at exclusive clubs in Japan and several years after that managing food-service businesses in the Chicago area.

His wife Martha, a Milwaukee area native, lured him to the Midwest and the Potawatami position.

“I knew all along owning my own restaurant is something I wanted to do,” Tsuchihashi said.

He even knew what kind of fare he wanted to feature — “the three B’s” — beer, bourbon and barbecue.

Fate brought him to Grafton.

“I wanted a building with some character and that could easily be converted into the kind of restaurant I wanted without having to start from scratch,” Tsuchihashi said.

The Paramount building proved to be a perfect fit.

“Built in 1845, it is the oldest commercial building in Ozaukee County, and has a great feeling to it,” he said.

[redacted]