

Everyone wants a taste of the Atrium

Office staff, tourists and moviegoers line up to dine in new landmark building

BY DARRON KLOSTER, TIMES COLONIST OCTOBER 7, 2010 7:56 AM



Zambri's chef and part owner Lewis Vacca, owner Josephine Zambri and chef Sam Benedetto, stand inside their new restaurant at the Atrium Building

Photograph by: Adrian Lam, timescolonist.com

Restaurants in the Atrium building are being overrun as customers flock to eat at the new downtown development.

"If my own mother were sitting at a table I wouldn't have recognized her -- it's been overwhelming," said Josephine Zambri, who opened her Italian restaurant on the ground floor of the Atrium, at Yates and Blanshard streets, a week ago.

Since then, there have been queues for tables as rare October sunshine pours into the outdoor patio and inside the glass-encased restaurant. Many patrons are loyal customers from the past 11 years, when Zambri's was a block away at Harris Green.

Others are office workers, moviegoers and tourists attracted to the 3,600-square-foot restaurant by its central location and a first-time look at the acclaimed design of the Atrium.

The curved six-storey, \$100-million building -- built by Jawl Properties and designed by Franc D'Ambrosio -- is the new corporate home to B.C. Ferries which has already occupied about half of the 200,000 square feet of Class A office space. The major attraction is the building's namesake -- an

8,000-square-foot atrium with art, mature olive trees and banks of elevators. It allows Zambri's customers and office workers to look out of windows and over balconies to the building's interior.

Zambri, who owns the 120-seat restaurant with her brother, her husband and other shareholders, asked diners to be patient as staff got used to new equipment, new ways of working and increased traffic.

"If you have good food, people will find you and people have been supporting us so well for 11 years," said Zambri. "Now we are getting so many more people just because of this location. It's in the middle of everything. We just need to tweak things a bit here and there. People have been patient with us."

On the other side of the Atrium from Zambri's is Pig -- famous for its pulled-pork sandwiches, beef brisket and baked beans -- which is pushing through hundreds of customers a day. Being busy is not new for owner Jeff Heatherington, who did a booming business out of his closet-sized takeout premises on View Street. But Heatherington is feeling the heat of serving a raft of new customers.

About 450 people were served on opening day and those numbers were remaining steady, said Heatherington. "Lunch has been insane, but that's OK," he said. "We're working out some kinks. The logistics on getting something like this going are huge, but people have been patient."

Yesterday, Heatherington had a full house at lunch, with people gobbling down the southern barbecue fare, Phillips beer and whisky sours. "Great lunch. Absolutely fantastic," said one office worker. "I'll be back often."

Heatherington, who opened on the West Shore last year, is converting his View Street location into a hot dog joint, called Pig Dog "when I have the energy."

Among the lunch crowd at the Atrium yesterday were Philip Nyren, who owns a men's and women's wear store a block away, and local builder Mike Miller.

Both marvelled at the building's design and popularity. They also liked the fact that the Atrium was built by a local family using local designers and contractors, and was filled with home-grown businesses on the ground floor.

"It's great to see all these people pulled together in a fantastic new development," said Nyren. "It's great for all of these businesses. Traffic begets traffic, and I think they will all do well."

"In this economy, it's a great success story," said Miller.

Several other businesses are on the verge of opening. Next to Zambri's, Habit Coffee will open most likely by tomorrow. Workers were installing espresso machines and fixtures yesterday as the reclaimed fir floor was given some finishing touches.

A.J.'s Organic Cafe, a coffee shop and bistro, and an extension of Alesha Davies' catering business, is due to open today.

Co-manager Sara Dewaal said A.J.'s would serve Fernwood coffee as well as sandwiches, salads and baked goods. The produce was coming from Madrona Farm and Dan's Farm, she said. All food and dairy would be "organic and local."

Cook Culture, selling kitchen products, and print shop Metropol are still a few weeks away as drywallers work inside storefronts along Blanshard Street.

Poppies Floral Art, a flower shop owned by mom-and-daughter team Mary-Jane Posno and Andrea Posno-Walker, will open about the same time, likely Oct. 28. Access to Poppies will be from inside the Atrium.

© Copyright (c) The Victoria Times Colonist

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)



Zambri's chef and part owner Lewis Vacca, owner Josephine Zambri and chef Sam Benedetto, stand inside their new restaurant at the Atrium Building

Photograph by: Adrian Lam, timescolonist.com

