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Local taste at Patriot Place

Foxboro couple to open only locally-owned restaurant at upscale plaza

BY MICHAEL GELBWASSER

It's been 15 years since Harnden Road resident Patti Martin was the new kid on the block in Foxboro.

Next month, Patriot Place welcomes Martin's first restaurant as the only local kid on the block.

Tastings Wine Bar & Bistro will live among such name brands as CBS Scene, Showcase Cinema De Luxe and Brigham & Women's and Massachusetts General hospitals at the Kraft family's new commercial development next to Gillette Stadium on Route 1.

Featuring 105 seats, including an outdoor patio overlooking the stadium, Tastings is the only Patriot Place tenant owned and operated by a local resident, Patriot Place General Manager Brian Earley said.

First venture

And even though this is the couple's first such venture in the restaurant business, Earley said the plan and designs presented by Martin and her husband Bill were what got them a seat at the Krafts' table.

"We welcomed them with open arms," Earley said. "What we are trying to do here is something very unique. Unique is something that goes down to the individual tenants."



BLUE-PLATE SPECIAL -- Patti and Bill Martin, at left, owners of the new Tastings Wine Bar and Bistro, pose on the restaurant's patio, which overlooks Gillette Stadium, with general manager Mike Mihalow, and executive chief Rich Garcia, right, at Patriot Place. (Photo by Drew Pillsbury)

Offering a small-plate menu and an extensive wine-by-the-glass program, Tastings is expected to open in mid-to-late August.

Martin said her experience among corporate giants should be an example for other small business owners.

She says she enjoys patronizing the small establishments. "I like to go to those kinds of 'people' businesses, because they seem to have their pulse on what's going on," she said.

Martin was a self-employed graphic designer for 18 years, and most recently was involved in the Foxboro public schools.



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The idea for Tastings came to her and her husband while visiting a wine bar in Florida, she explained.

"On a Wednesday night, the place was pretty packed. We both kind of looked at each other and said, 'This is kind of interesting,'" Martin said.

"If this was done offering some food ..."

The Martins travel extensively, and have been wine connoisseurs for several years, she said. So the idea of running a wine bar was an extension of that interest and knowledge. The concept formed, the couple decided to see if Patriot Place in their hometown had space available. In return, officials there asked the Martins to assemble a business plan. Two weeks later, the couple met with members of the Kraft organization, who liked the idea, Martin said. Soon, they will be opening their first restaurant.

Tastings will offer diners a chance to taste a variety of dishes, meeting the demands of those who enjoy eating healthy even when they eat out.

"The new trend is to order small portions," Martin said. "You taste a lot of things and pair it with some wines."

Pairing the right food and the right wine "changes everything. It really changes your experience," she said.

Tastings' dishes will use fresh ingredients, some grown at local farms, she said, noting that "the fish (will come) from the boats on the Cape and the Northeast."

Among the menu highlights will be: local rack of lamb with honey foamed aioli; mussels on the half shell with late summer tomato; and pinot noir braised American Kobe short rib with boursin polenta and garlic roasted mushrooms.

Executive Chef Richard Garcia was hired after an interview that included — by necessity, with Tastings under construction — preparing food in Martin's renovated kitchen.

Fresh ingredients are a hallmark of Garcia's style, Martin said.

The small plate menu price range will be \$5 to \$19. The average cost of a dinner will be \$35 to \$45.

The wine-by-the-glass program, meanwhile, will allow customers to sample a variety of tastes without spending \$90 to \$100 for a bottle of something they might not like, Martin said.

"You might like to try a glass of it," she said.

The dining room will feature 75 seats. The outdoor patio will have 30 seats, overlooking Gillette.

"What drew us to Patriot Place from the get-go was its location, location, location," Martin said. "When you see the amount of foot traffic on a game day, or a non-game day ..."
It's a great neighborhood, in other words.

"Everyone that walks into that space — including Mr. Kraft — thinks the location we have is without a doubt the best location in the project," Martin said.

When it opens, Tastings' hours will be Sunday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., and Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to midnight. The bar may be open until 2 a.m. during peak periods.

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