

SCOTTSDALE

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Scottsdale tavern owner buys downtown gelato shop

by Edward Gately - Aug. 18, 2010 05:15 PM The Arizona Republic 1 comment

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Paul Mitchell wasn't planning to become a bar owner in Old Town Scottsdale.

He purchased Old Town Tavern, formerly Brackins Bar, in September, and at that time wasn't even that familiar with downtown Scottsdale. Old Town Tavern is near Brown Avenue and Main Street behind Mexican Imports.



"I didn't really know anything about the area," Mitchell said. "I left (Arizona) in 1995 and I hadn't been back in 12-13 years. I had looked at bars down in Ahwatukee, and it was my son's mother who really pointed me in this direction and said, 'There's a quaint little bar down here you should look at.' "

Mitchell said he "really got lucky" with his first venture in Old Town, and now is the process of purchasing a second business in the neighborhood, Gelato Classico, an Italian ice-cream parlor on Brown and First Street.

"I like getting into something that needs help," he said. "I think (Gelato Classico) is in that place where . . . it needs someone to come in and reignite it. That's what I enjoy doing: changing it, cleaning it up, marketing it, selling it and going from that aspect of it. And I think we'll do well."

Mitchell plans to purchase Gelato Classico by Sept. 1. The owner, Lilya Gabriel, has been running Gelato Classico for 10 years and looks forward to taking a break.

She's enjoyed running the business and socializing with customers.

"You see people from all over the world," she said. "They are very nice and they like gelato, and they say, 'Your gelato is the best, even in Europe it's not like that.' "

Old Town Tavern dates back to the early 1980s and originally was called J. Chew & Co. The Song family, which owns Mexican Imports, opened it as a small neighborhood spot with outdoor patios and a cozy, casual atmosphere.

J. Chew & Co. closed in the late 1990s, then reopened under new ownership as Brackins Bar. Mitchell then purchased the bar and renamed it Old Town Tavern.

With a business background in sales and marketing, Mitchell had never owned a bar before, so he wanted a small operation with no food service.

"It seemed simple and that's what attracted me," he said. "Plus, as I continued to learn more and more about the place . . . I know I fell into a very nice, kind of historic little place in its own right. It's dumb luck because I wasn't really looking in Old Town."

Mitchell has renovated the bar, added live music and will be showing movies and pro football games via projector on the wall of the building next door.

He now has his sights set on Gelato Classico, which he plans to remodel and reopen as a frozen yogurt and ice-cream shop under the Old Town brand. The business is not a full-time operation and could be attracting more customers with a different product mix, he said.

"These other businesses, like Yogurtini in Tempe or Yogurtland up the street, they do an unbelievable business," Mitchell said. "I went by Gelato Classico on a Wednesday night about 6 p.m. and there was nobody there, and I went up the street to Yogurtland and that place was packed."

Mitchell thinks he can turn the business from a sleepy operation to one bustling with customers.

"I could call it Old Town Creamery," he said. "I'd like to expand the concept of Old Town, which is perfect for the area. And I've got the ability to cross-market both places. If people don't want to come in (Old Town Tavern) and have a drink, you've got the creamery where people can come in and enjoy ice cream, yogurt or gelato."



Edward Gately/The Arizona Republic

Paul Mitchell, owner of Old Town Tavern, plans to purchase Gelato Classico down the street and reopen it as a new business under his Old Town brand.

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