

# Downtown development under way

Hillary Gavan | Posted: Tuesday, January 17, 2012 4:00 pm

Peter Gabriele, owner of La Casa Grande and Domenico's restaurants, has significant investments under way in Beloit.

He has plans to expand Palermo's Pizza in the back of La Casa Grande, upgrade his patio at Domenico's and transform the former site of the Shell Station at the corner of St. Lawrence Avenue and Fourth Street.

Gabriele is slowly inching his way down Fourth Street. He opened La Casa Grande, 618 Fourth St., in 2003 and its banquet hall in late 2005. To continue developing the area, Gabriele took advantage of TIF funds to start redeveloping his property at 648 and 658 Fourth St., the home of the former Shell station in Beloit, formerly home to two abandoned buildings.

The two buildings' interiors were gutted with the exterior of the buildings getting a new paint job. The second floor bay windows were all remodeled, and storefront is scheduled for completion in early 2012. Gabriele is still weighing his options for the property, but is confident the renovations will make the site prime for business. Although no decisions have been made regarding the property, he said his specialty is food and beverages.

"The site will likely reflect that," he said. "There's strong potential there."

Gabriele also plans to expand Palermo's Pizza operations. Located behind La Casa Grande, Palermo's a carryout operation. It offers delivery services of Italian and American cuisine as well as making deliveries for La Casa Grande. He said Palermo's was originally opened in 1968 by his father in South Beloit. In 2004, Gabriele made an addition to the back of La Casa Grande to incorporate the business.

At Domenico's, 547 E. Grand Ave., Gabriele used his own personal funds to invest in adding new entrances in 2011. Cement was poured for a scenic outdoor patio for customers to enjoy, and murals, outdoor furniture, aluminum gates and lighting and stone columns were added to transport visitors to the feel of Italy. Gabriele said the first phase of project had been started in spring of 2010 and was wrapped up in June.

In 2012, Gabriele will continue phase II of the project which will include a new roof system with planters and greenery and an additional area for musical entertainment.

"I believe any time you do something good and exciting it will attract people to your location. I like to create spaces that are fun and draw people in," Gabriele said. "I take great pride in developing these

things, and the goal is to see my customers happy which in turn is the root of success."

Gabriele is making bold moves along Fourth Street, but said he's a risk taker and sees opportunities.

"Despite how the economy is right now, I believe now's the time to invest," he said.

Gabriele said improvements at all the properties downtown this year really put Beloit over the top.

"The downtown improvements are really nice to see because we all help each other shine. I think it's great everyone's stepping up. There were also incentives offered by the state, and the city has been very cooperative and easy to work with. We are striving for the same goal."



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