

NEW CAFE OFFERS CULINARY ADVENTURE

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BELOIT - Expect a culinary adventure at the Velvet Buffalo Cafe, 500 Public Ave. The new restaurant with 120 wine labels and an exotic menu of petite portions officially opened Wednesday night, following soft openings Monday and Tuesday.

Located on the first floor of the Goodwin Hotel, the cafe offers small plates and artisan pizzas cooked in a stone-fire oven.

In an interview Wednesday morning, General Manager Rocky Kitzman said he was expecting 50 customers that evening following the more than 150 people who flocked to the new restaurant Monday and Tuesday.

"Everybody's loving the food. The five-spice ribs have been the hit of the party," Kitzman said.

The cafe will be open from 5-10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 5-11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. The Velvet Buffalo's ribbon cutting is set for 4 p.m. Oct. 26. The restaurant is managed by Geronimo Hospitality Group, a company affiliated with Hendricks Commercial Properties.

Kitzman explained how the smaller portions are designed to be shared. As patrons sip and taste, they can expect to stumble upon unique conversation starters such as the menus wrapped around napkins.

"It's designed to be interactive, from the service to the way you eat the food," Kitzman said.

Some of the recommended menu items are delicacies such as the Hokkaido pizza with an Asian flair or the chicken foie tartine, a pate topped with peppadew pepper, mascarpone and horseradish. There's also flank steak and buttermilk fried chicken for the most traditional taste buds.

For dessert, diners can try the pot de creme, of chocolate and port topped with a truffle whipped cream.

Not only are customers enjoying the Velvet Buffalo, Kitzman said it's also been a great professional experience for staff. Around 30 staff members have already been hired with plans to hire more servers and kitchen staff. Employees underwent a one-day training at Merrill & Houston's Steak Joint and took classes on food and wine presentation and Geronimo's high standards at Irontek.

"I want my staff to be knowledgeable and speak eloquently about the menu," Kitzman said.

Kitzman, who was a carpenter until the economy turned, said he hopes to work with those who want to pursue careers in food and hospitality. Once he began working in a kitchen he fell in love with it.

"You can make money and a career in the restaurant business. For some people it's a passion and a calling," he said.

Kitzman previously worked in the Lake Geneva area at Pier 290, and for Geronimo Hospitality at ID in Delafield, Wisconsin. He was impressed with the elegant yet upbeat and friendly atmosphere those at the restaurant are



Hillary Gavan/Beloit Daily News (From left): Velvet Buffalo General Manger Rocky Kitzman and Chef Ethan Greene hold out a goat cheese and peppadew wonton and arancini appetizer and pork cutlets and buttermilk fried chicken. The restaurant officially opened on Wednesday evening after two nights of soft openings.

working to cultivate. Kitzman hopes to make customer visits fun and educational as they explore the myriad of wine and food combinations.



"I'm excited to be here to give Beloit something new. I love food and wine and love sharing it with people," Kitzman said.

Chef Ethan Green previously worked at ID under Chef Joe Heppe. He said he was drawn to the Velvet Buffalo because he liked the concept it offered and wanted to bring his skills to Beloit. He said the restaurant has offered him the creativity to put items on the menu he enjoys - simple easy foods which the Velvet Buffalo can do better.

Greene and Kitzman noted the Velvet Buffalo will also serve the roof-top terrace space which will be open to private events and conferences.