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Restaurant to join Gloucester City in bid to revive its seafaring flavor

Philadelphia Business Journal - by [Jed Weisberger](#) Special to the Business Journal

GLOUCESTER CITY, N.J. — A seasonal rock-lobster-type eatery with outdoor seating has been proposed as the first new restaurant to be opened at the Freedom Pier as part of the city's plan to transform its waterfront into an Irish village-themed destination.

The venue, to be called Paddy O'D's, was proposed by Pat O'Donnell, whose family owned O'Donnell's Restaurant on Broadway for 65 years before he sold it. The restaurant is scheduled to open April 1.

"I'm all with what the city is trying to do," said O'Donnell, who presently manages the **Moorestown Field Club**. "There is a lot of potential here and I'm certainly willing to invest my money to be a part of it."

A member of the city administration said finalization of the plan awaits the awarding of a liquor license.

The city's recent call for restaurant proposals is a first step toward realizing an ambitious plan to revitalize the area around the Freedom Pier, which has had little activity since the **United States Coast Guard** closed a base here in 1986.

"Nobody had really walked on our pier for 20 years," said Bob Bevan, special projects coordinator for Mayor William James and himself a former mayor of the Camden County city, located just south of the Walt Whitman Bridge. "Now, we're looking to make that all change."

A study for the city by JGSC Group LLC, a consulting firm in Merchantville, suggested that Gloucester City could transform its waterfront corridor along King and Water streets into an Irish village.

In addition, two other retail districts are envisioned. One, along Broadway between Jersey Avenue and Division Street and Powell Street to Hudson Street and Essex Street to Linden Street, would focus on lifestyle retail such as personal services, eateries and grocery stores. The other, adjacent to the convergence of Rt. 130 and I-76 leading to the Walt Whitman Bridge, would be suitable for furniture stores, car dealerships and home improvement stores.

The city named Sora Holdings of Glassboro as the redeveloper for the project in May.

"The Walt Whitman Bridge carries 164,000 cars everyday," said Bevan, 62. "We'd like some of them to stop and take a look, but we need something to offer."

The city has already bought a 75-foot schooner named North Wind for \$200,000. The restored vessel will be used for sailing excursions from Freedom Pier and to serve as a floating marine educational exhibit and classroom for youth sailing programs. The schooner will be renamed with an Irish flair.

It will share the pier with the Flagship VI, a 65-foot, 150-passenger cruise boat that began offering sightseeing and charter trips June 1.

"We have always prided ourselves on being a seafaring town that was built by blue-collar workers," said Bevan. "Forty-two percent of our residents trace their ancestry back to Ireland and that

influence has always been felt here.”

The plan is to build multi-purpose structures with retail outlets on the first floor, offices on the second floor and condos on the third.

“There always are naysayers in any ambitious project like this,” said Mayor James, 52, a former Gloucester police officer before being elected 18 months ago. “The community, however, has been supportive. Our residents elected us to get something done.”

Diane Fisher, owner of Sunshine Flowers and Gifts on Broadway, says the project has support from business owners.

“The mayor and the council we recently elected are really a new regime for us,” she said. “They are ambitious people and want to get things done.”

Dee MacAdams, who owns Erin’s Secret Garden on Monmouth Street a few blocks from the waterfront, thinks the redevelopment and the Irish Village have a good chance of succeeding.

“When I first came to Gloucester to open my business, I really wanted to get a place on King Street,” said MacAdams, a resident of Brooklawn. “I could see the potential of what could be done there. I really hope all this succeeds. It will help all of our businesses.”

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