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White Dog Cafe, Moshulu owner set to open 2 new restaurants

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Fearless Restaurants, parent company of Moshulu and the White Dog Cafe, is moving forward with plans to open two new restaurants in the Philadelphia suburbs.

Fearless will open an “Italian soul food” concept named Rosalie and a fourth White Dog Cafe in the next five weeks. Owner Marty Grims said he is bullish on the future of the hospitality industry, even after Covid-19 slashed his restaurant group’s sales and postponed the openings of the two restaurants.



FEARLESS RESTAURANTS

A first look at some of the fare at Rosalie, an “Italian soul food” concept opening later this month.

Rosalie is set to open at the Wayne Hotel in Wayne on Aug. 26 with 40 outdoor seats. The White Dog Cafe in Glen Mills, located at The Shoppes at Brinton Lake, will open Sept. 7 and have 104 outdoor seats and an additional 160 seats inside, with 15 at the indoor bar and 12 at the outside bar. Outdoor dining has been a lifeline for many of Fearless’ concepts during the pandemic, Grims said, as indoor seating remains

limited to 25% capacity because of statewide restrictions put in place by Gov. Tom Wolf.

Across Fearless' seven open restaurants, the company saw revenue dive between 50% and 70% due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the slower summer season, Grims said. The decline is severe, but the restaurants aren't in danger of closing, he said. The restaurant group owner is focusing on the long-term vision for his company and banking on people wanting to return to restaurants.

"In the short term, it's definitely concerning," Grims said. "I think that if we weren't bullish about our brand and our location and our business, I think it's severe enough that you question whether or not you want to go on."

Rosalie's Italian soul food, billed as "rustic, approachable and comfortable," will be served up by Chef Merick Devine, formerly the chef de cuisine at James Beard Award-winning Frasca Food and Wine in Boulder, Colorado. Michael Selser, former executive chef at White Dog Cafe Haverford will head up the kitchen at White Dog in Glen Mills.

The two restaurants were more than a year and a half in the making. Their openings were postponed because of pandemic-related shutdowns of factories producing custom furniture for the concepts, said Sydney Grims, director of business development at Fearless Restaurants and Marty's daughter. Leases already started for the two spaces, so it was in their best interest to open, she said.

"It certainly has been overwhelming in its own way, but it's also a light at the end of the tunnel," Sydney Grims said. "It's like looking forward to a new baby coming into the family."

Fearless' expansion doesn't plan to stop at Rosalie and the latest iteration of White Dog. The Glen Mills market still has a lot of "unrealised potential" and is a relatively young market when compared with neighboring towns' restaurant scenes, Sydney Grims said. Fearless is

looking at Newtown and the Princeton, New Jersey, market as well, but Marty Grims said he likely wouldn't sign a lease tomorrow.

With the addition of the two new restaurants, Fearless will operate 11 concepts across Greater Philadelphia. Moshulu, the restaurant atop a boat docked at Penn's Landing, has been faring well with outdoor dining, Sydney Grims said. More than one-third of Moshulu's business is in private events — an arm of the business stalled because of the pandemic — but the massive deck of the boat can accommodate dozens of socially distanced diners, she said. Similarly, the restaurant group's other concepts from the Pennsylvania suburbs to the Jersey Shore have put up outdoor tents in parking lots to accommodate more outdoor dining customers, Marty Grims said.

September will be a pivotal month as the weather begins to change and outdoor dining becomes less desirable, he said. The owner said he hopes the restrictions on indoor dining are loosened soon, as Philadelphia and New Jersey have outright prohibited the practice because of Covid-19.

Two of Fearless' concepts in Philadelphia have presented a challenge and remain closed: the White Dog Cafe in University City and nearby French-American bistro Louie Louie. Sydney Grims said they plan to reopen Louie Louie on Wednesday and the White Dog Cafe soon after, depending on the reopening plans of nearby universities. With the lack of foot traffic in University City from local colleges like the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University, coupled with the city's continued prohibition on indoor dining, it didn't make sense to reopen earlier, Sydney Grim said.

"We really are depending on the universities, both Drexel and Penn, to reopen for the fall because it is absolutely dead down there," she said.

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