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Entrepreneurs jazz up the area with new restaurants

By **Paul Restuccia**

Friday, February 4, 2005

Thuydiem Le so believes in Downtown Lynn that she and her husband recently bought a small Munroe Street building that houses both their condo and their Vietnamese restaurant, called Pho Lynn.

“There are a lot people moving into downtown, and I thought that this would be a good place for a restaurant,” said Le, who worked 20 years managing Boston eateries before opening Pho Lynn. “We feel like pioneers, but a lot of people are excited about the future.”

Le's restaurant, which specializes in the Vietnamese noodle soup known as “pho,” is already a favorite of downtown Lynn's new crop of residents.

But the area has plenty of other eateries, too.

The famous seafood eatery Anthony's Hawthorne has closed, but many downtown storefronts house casual restaurants.

Tacos Lupita serves Mexican food, while Tatiana's offers American cuisine.

You can also often spot Dominican-born Red Sox stars Manny Ramirez and David Ortiz at Rincon Macorisano, a high-end Dominican restaurant.

Steve Feldman, who bought a condo last year at the Boston Machine Lofts, plans to open an upscale European bistro this spring.

Feldman recently got the first liquor license issued for downtown Lynn in 10 years for his planned Gulu-Gulu Cafe.

As for shopping, McClellan's, Burrows and other stores that made Downtown Lynn a shopping Mecca

until the 1960s are gone, but new shops have taken their places.

For instance, a jewelry store named Omar, opened last year. One edge of the downtown also hosts a strip mall that includes a Shaw's supermarket, a Pizza Hut and other establishments.

During the day, Downtown Lynn enjoys lots of bustle, much of involving students from the neighborhood's North Shore Community College and Gordon College's satellite campus.

Lynn Arts, the city's art consortium, has exhibits and workshops in its downtown building, while Raw Arts runs a well-regarded arts program for at-risk youth.

WFNX also broadcasts alternative music from a Downtown Lynn studio.

But residents and merchants admit there isn't much going on in the evenings.

“There's nowhere to go at night except for some dirty dive bars,” Feldman said. “We need some places for the new residents to call their own. If I can do well, others might follow suit.”

Feldman said several other recent loft buyers are drawing up plans to open up businesses, including a bookstore, a gym and upscale restaurant.

Entrepreneur-turned-developer Lowell Gray sees the neighborhood's potential.

Gray plans to next month open the Oxford Street Grill, a steakhouse with bar, on the ground floor of the former Hotel Oxford.



Gray bought the building - once a notorious rooming house - from the city in 1995 for \$100,000.

He originally planned to use the site to expand office space for Shore.Net, an Internet service provider Gray ran for about a decade.

But the dot-com bust squelched that plan, so Gray decided to convert the building into a restaurant, with three condos on the upper floors.

``There's a level of excitement and investment in Downtown Lynn that I've never seen in my 13 years here," he said. ``There's agreement between the political and business leaders on what needs to be done."`

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