

West Chester

Business Is Booming In West Chester Borough

by Greg Alzamora
Town Talk Correspondent

How does a community reinvent itself into a shopping destination and a restaurant town?

That's what has happened in West Chester Borough. A process of redevelopment and change has turned West Chester from a quiet, historic town, to one of the region's hot spots for food and shopping.

It starts with one new business, and things get rolling from there. In the late 1990's Iron Hill Brewery opened on the corner of High and Gay Sts., occupying what was three vacant buildings in the heart of the business district. Its unique cuisine and beers made the town a new destination.

"We were always trying, but we never got the right formula," said Borough Council President Paul Fitzpatrick. "Iron Hill came to town and it opened the floodgates. And the rest just followed."

What followed was a rash of openings of antique stores, art galleries and small retail

shops. The boroughs work to give Gay Street a community feel, starting with the brick sidewalks and benches, has gone a long way in attracting people to the heart of town.

Branching out from the success they have had on Gay Street, West Chester is in the middle of renovations to neighboring Market Street, one block south of Gay. On both sides of Market Street, the sidewalks will be widened

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significantly, with a colorful red brick veneer.

"I think Market Street went from a place that felt like a highway to a place where you actually want to stop," said Dave Magrogan, the owner and operator of West Chester's newest hot spot, Kildare's Irish Pub. "It will be the vital retail community that it never was. I think Market will blossom; it will

give the town a whole lot more depth."

"We were looking at what we had done on Gay Street, and we had that in mind for Market Street," added Fitzpatrick.

The money for the Market street project came from urban planning and grants to the borough.

Two more restaurants are in the immediate future, Baxter's and Coyote

Crossing, and the question is beginning to be asked if the point of over saturation has been reached.

"We are approaching that point," Fitzpatrick said. "Virtually everyone agrees we are getting close to the point (of saturation)."

Magrogan had a different perspective.

"It's a concern," he said. "We need another base to



Visitors to West Chester enjoy al fresco dining at its many new restaurants.

bring people into town, and that's the retail picture. How many restaurants can the locals support? I don't think we have any overlaps, but we have to watch that we don't offer just be restaurants; we have to promote retail businesses, too."

Which is what the sidewalk expansion of Market street hopefully will do.

As for Kildare's, business is good. Magrogan said the place has far exceeded his early financial expectations and has announced plans for a second location at the former Pizzeria Uno by the King of Prussia Mall. Its opening date is set for the spring of 2004.

Some were worried his location down the street from the recently opened PJ Ryan's, also with an Irish theme,

West Chester Borough

Est. 1799

Borough Hall: 401 E. Gay Street West Chester, PA 19380

Phone: 610-692-7574

Mayor: Richard Yoder

Area: 1.8 square miles

Population: 17,861 (2000 Census)

West Chester Area School District: 610-436-7000;

www.wcasd.k12.pa.us/

School Closing Number: 851

might diminish both businesses.

"I wasn't afraid, because their market and our market are completely different," he said. "It's a different crowd. We are a restaurant, they're a little more of an Irish American Pub, they're not really our competition."

With the borough's three largest employers, West Chester University, the County, and West Chester Hospital nearby, it seems as if the borough has provided something for everybody, and as long as business is good, everyone's happy.