

Swampscott native's restaurant may revitalize Lynn downtown

The newly formed Lynn Restaurant Group will open the Blue Ox, a family-friendly American restaurant in downtown Lynn. Former Boston chef and Swampscott native Matt O'Neil (No. 9 Park, Prezza and Copia) will drive the kitchen and create the menu with "something for everyone" to comprise of "comfort food with a twist," options including from gourmet burgers, interesting salads, fresh seafood, and soul-warming soups.

The opening of Blue Ox will bolster efforts by the Lynn Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC) to revitalize the downtown and nearby waterfront.

"This is an exciting and important development for Lynn," said James Cowdell, executive director, EDIC. "This is an important

piece of the puzzle in the redevelopment of the downtown and the nearby waterfront."

Mark DeJoie, principal of the newly formed Lynn Restaurant Group, Inc., and O'Neil plan to open the Blue Ox in March 2009 on Oxford Street in the heart of the downtown. The restaurant will seat approximately 100 and an adjoining function room will accommodate up to 35 people.

With his background as a Swampscott native and current Nahant resident, O'Neil, who has impressive culinary credentials, thinks he knows what people in the region want from a restaurant of this ilk.

"We're not trying to compete with Boston or break new culinary ground here," said O'Neil. "We want to do something on the North Shore that North Shore people will

enjoy. We want people to come in and get friendly service and a first-class meal with great value, designed with the customer in mind."

DeJoie and O'Neil realize some might question the timing of opening a restaurant in this economy. They recognize it may not be the optimal time, but they are undeterred.

"We are trying to create a place that people want to go to," DeJoie said. "Everyone agrees the downtown needs a restaurant. There is a market for it."

O'Neil is the host of the "Cooking Coach" Sundays on ESPN's "Fantasy Football Now," also found at www.thecookingcoachonline.com. O'Neil is a graduate of Bates College in Maine and the Culinary Institute of America in New York.