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Opa-Opa eyes Northampton nightlife

Principals to buy Strong Avenue hot spot

By CATHERINE BAUM
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NORTHAMPTON - The Rizos brothers of Opa-Opa Brewing Co. are poised to move into Northampton with a major acquisition this month.

Efthimios and Antonio Rizos and former Opa-Opa employees Petros Mirisis and Volkan Polapol are set to buy the 41 Strong Ave. building that houses Mulino's Trattoria, Bishop's Lounge and the Sierra Grille, along with two of those three businesses.

Along with the building once known as the Bay State Hotel, they will acquire Mulino's Trattoria and Bishop's Lounge.

They plan to close the deal this month, pending state approval of the liquor license transfer from the building's current owners, Daniel and Anthony Bishop, according to Efthimios Rizos. He noted the city has already approved the liquor license transfer.

The Rizos brothers also own Opa-Opa Steakhouse & Brewery on College Highway in Southampton and Opa-Opa Brewery on Main Street in Williamsburg. Their products are sold in liquor stores, bars and restaurants in Massachusetts, Connecticut and Florida.

The Bishops, who have owned the building for five years, are selling because of time constraints, Daniel Bishop said. The family is busy managing its other businesses, Aquarius Plumbing & Heating in Easthampton and Tranquility Day Spa in Florence, but they have had a good run on Strong Avenue, he said.

"The town's been good ... it's a restaurant town," Bishop said. "It has its ups and downs. Summer tends to be more quiet."

Bishop declined to reveal the sale price.

Gift certificates that were sold prior to the sale will be honored by the new owners, and the menus will have new items but are "mainly going to be the same," according to Rizos. The two establishments will also retain their employees.

"We like Bishop's and Mulino's; they have good names," Rizos said. "Bishop's is a busy bar - a lot of people like it and enjoy it."

The Rizos brothers, Mirisis and Polapol are interested in the Strong Avenue building because "it's the best location in western Mass.," Rizos said.

Meanwhile, the Sierra Grille on the first floor will continue to be managed by owner O'Brian Tomalin, who has been there since June 14, 2006. Tomalin said he knew the sale was possible when he signed the lease two years ago. His business is "protected in the lease," which is up in three years, thanks to a notice term clause that extends his lease to the new owners of the building. His lease will not be renegotiated with the new owners.

"The important thing is, I'm not going anywhere," Tomalin said.

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The Sierra Grille has been received well by the community and has a good relationship with the businesses upstairs, Tomalin said.

"We have a unified front as far as the building is represented," Tomalin said. "We've shown great growth, and we don't seem to be slowing down."

The Sierra Grille provides live music entertainment on nights that Bishop's Lounge does not, including indie rock on Thursday and jazz on Sunday and Monday.

"We try not to step on any toes as far as live music goes," Tomalin said.

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