

Chef Christopher to open Gallatin event center by Christmas

BY DESSISLAVA YANKOVA • The News Examiner
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Sumner County's largest public event center is on schedule to open by Christmas of 2010 in Gallatin.

Westmoreland-based Chef Christopher's Catering has purchased a 30,000-square-foot facility with a 10,000-square-foot paved courtyard at 394 W. Main St. The company plans to transform the building into an event center to accommodate up to 700 people for weddings, receptions, business functions, arts shows, concerts and more.

Business owners Christopher and Brenda Newton spoke of the new purchase and its future development on Thursday, July 15 at Volunteer State Community College in Gallatin, where the Tennessee Small Business Development Center (TSBDC) presented the entrepreneurs with the 2009 Rising Star Award. It is given annually to the local business that has best utilized the center's resources to thrive and stir economic growth.

County and city officials joined the Newtons' family and friends at the ceremony that Chef Christopher's catered with fruit-and-cheese trays, beef tenderloin, the original-recipe She Crab dip and an assortment of miniature desserts.

Center to fill vital need

The Epic Event Center, to be located next to Charlie's Golf Carts on West Main Street, will include three ballrooms of various sizes. The building has previously housed a golf-cart dealership and a warehouse among other businesses, officials said.

Business owners are renovating the facility and hope to open it by Christmas.

"When we have a large group of people here for an event, we send them to Nashville," Christopher Newton said. "We don't have to do that anymore. We think it will bring lots of business to Gallatin and lots of tax dollars to Sumner County."

That's the view local officials share of the new facility that will meet a vital space need in the growing county.

"It will be the biggest public facility of its kind," said Clay Walker, executive director of the Gallatin Economic Development Agency. "We have folks here who are in a desperate need of this kind of space. We and some of our existing industries have had events where they needed to get a caterer, and people have generously opened their doors to us and we've made due, but current spaces are just not designed for large groups gatherings.

"Some of our corporate headquarters have called us to help them find a facility to hold their corporate events, and we've had to take them to Nashville. We lose money and exposure. We experience tangible and intangible losses when we can't host events here."

Facility builds on progress

Another component of local economic progress, along with the new library, renovated public square and the Connect Gallatin wireless network, the new facility will not only prevent leakage of local cash flow but also attract new revenue streams to Gallatin and the county.

"It will bring in new money from surrounding communities that don't have this kind of facilities," Walker said. "When you have things like this, it also



Chef Christopher Newton and his wife, Brenda, of Westmoreland recently purchased a 30,000-square-foot Gallatin facility on West Main Street and intend to open an event center to host weddings, receptions, business functions and more. (FILE PHOTO)

makes it easier to recruit companies because it's another very, very important attribute you can present of a well-rounded, growing community. It's just another reason for businesses and people to come here."

City approves project site, usage

Members of Gallatin's Planning Commission anonymously approved the facility's site and space usage during their May 10 meeting. Although the building could eventually accommodate 700 patrons, city officials have approved it for 468 based on the current 117 available onsite parking spots. Business owners are considering additional parking options, including valet parking.

"That's not to say they couldn't work out some type of a system for additional parking to expand occupancy," said city planner Kevin Chastine, who oversees the project.

The entrepreneurs are working on the blueprints of the building design that will also need approval from the city codes department.

"It's sort of exciting to be able to come in and take an old building and convert it and get new use out of it and upgrade it," planner and civil engineer Bruce Rainey said at the May meeting. Rainey is helping to plan the event center.

Project fulfills couple's dream

The project has been a dream for Christopher and Brenda Newton, who have continuously grown and developed their business for the past eight years through quality service and conservative budgeting.

"We've worked so hard to get to this point," said Christopher Newton, who's been in the culinary industry for 30 years. "We've always saved money and lived below our means. We can have a big house and big cars but we think of the next generation. We're so excited!"

Constant striving toward their goal is a main reason that facilitated this milestone in the business' growth, TSBDC Director Charles Alexander said.

"It's a niche that's yet to be filled in Sumner County," Alexander said. "They're going to be

opening something that doesn't have much local competition, and they have the opportunity to grow their business exponentially. And the biggest thing to get across is that they've been methodical about this. They've set goals and achieved them through excellent implementation of sound business practices."

The Newtons plan to become the first couple to wed in the completed facility with a renewal of their vows.

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