

SCARLET OAK TAVERN - RESTAURANT REDO: Brothers to open steakhouse in former Blackfin

By STEVE ADAMS
The Patriot Ledger

HINGHAM - A landmark Main Street restaurant in Hingham that's been vacant for nearly two years has a new lease on life. Brothers Jed and Josh Webber are renovating the former Blackfin Chop House and Raw Bar, turning it into an upscale steakhouse called the Scarlet Oak Tavern. They plan to reopen the restaurant in June.

"We have kind of a soft spot for places that are sort of charming and you can make the magic happen," Jed Webber said.

Originally a Colonial home, the 250-year-old structure operated as the Country Fare restaurant for 44 years before reopening as the Whiton House restaurant in 1981. After the Whiton House closed in 1997, it was converted into Siros, an Italian restaurant, before being sold to chef Anthony Ambrose to become his second Blackfin location. The original is in Boston's South End.

Both Webbers have business backgrounds and MBAs from the University of Virginia's Darden School. Joshua, who lives in Hamilton, worked in mergers and acquisitions for Morgan Stanley. Jed, a Cambridge resident, worked as a consultant in New York City for five years before joining the Plumpjack Restaurant Group in San Francisco.

In 2000, they bought a Groton dairy farm and converted it into the Gibbet Hill Grill, an upscale steakhouse, and the Barn at Gibbet Hill, a function hall.

Now they're donning hard hats and overseeing a million-dollar renovation of the 250-year-old Hingham landmark.

The Webbers had been looking around the Boston suburbs for a second location when they drove past the Hingham site on the way to view another property. They recently signed a long-term lease for the building, which is owned by A.W. Perry Corp. of Boston.

While the Blackfin Chop House lasted just two years at the Hingham location, the Webbers hope to appeal to a broader range of diners with a "sophisticated comfort food" menu and an expanded tavern.

They plan a more family-friendly and affordable format than Blackfin. The tavern is being expanded into the former sun porch, and will have capacity for 90 people including a bar that seats 29. The goal is to create a more social atmosphere, Jed Webber said.

A 110-seat dining room will feature entrees beginning in the teens, with steaks in the \$20 to \$30 range. Private dining rooms and bars upstairs will be reserved for special events.

Executive chef K.C. O'Hara is developing a menu that includes steaks and comfort food staples such as



Brothers Josh and Jed Webber are renovating the former Blackfin Chop House and Raw Bar on Main Street in South Hingham and will rename it the Scarlet Oak Tavern. They're aiming for a June opening. (GARY HIGGINS/The Patriot Ledger)

shepherd's pie and meatloaf. O'Hara formerly worked at Cambridge's East Coast Grill and Harvard Faculty Club and Boston's Sonsie restaurant.

"We're trying to design this place for people who just want to come in and have a cup of chowder and a burger and a beer and sit in the tavern and watch the game," Jed Webber said. "But it'll also work for businesspeople who want to go in the dining room and have a steak and a bottle of wine."

70-YEAR HISTORY

The historic home house at 1217 Main St. in Hingham has been home to several restaurants in the last 70 years:

The Country Fare: 1937-1981

The Whiton House: 1981-1997

Siros: 1998-2003

Blackfin Chop House & Raw Bar: 2003-2005

Scarlet Oak Tavern: Estimated opening in June

Steve Adams may be reached at sadams@ledger.com.

Copyright 2007 The Patriot Ledger
Transmitted Tuesday, March 13, 2007