

FLEURS DE LIS BRINGS A NEW TASTE TO DOWNTOWN

Former chef of Anis brings France to Forsyth Street

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Lenny Robinson, co-owner of Les Fleurs de Lis Cafe, a new restaurant located in downtown Atlanta's Healey Building, didn't grow up wanting to be a chef. He thought he'd be an engineer.

But while in college, Robinson needed a job and became a line cook at a sports bar. "I started working in nicer places and learned more and more," said Robinson, now a fully certified chef with 23 years of experience under his belt.

A cozy 73-seat restaurant, Fleurs de Lis is open for breakfast and lunch Mondays through Fridays and for dinner on Thursday nights. Those dinners have gone so well that Robinson will soon add Tuesday night to the café's dinner lineup and said he'll consider staying open more nights a week once he gets his liquor license.

"They've welcomed us with open arms -- both the neighborhood and the city of Atlanta," Robinson said.

Open three months, Fleurs de Lis already claims regulars and Robinson and his co-owner and partner, Roger Carr, are amenable to exploring opening restaurants in other mixed-use properties.

"This [restaurant] is a prototype for future endeavors," Robinson said. "I'm already kicking around ideas."

Right now, though, he's focused on ramping up dinner at Fleurs de Lis and adding a Sunday brunch.

That said, Robinson, the former chef of Anis, a French restaurant in Buckhead, would like to see downtown pick up after dark rather than shut down as the commuters head home.

Richard Ullman, director of leasing for Ultima Real Estate Services, sympathizes with Robinson. "Downtown still has a way to go. We all need to work toward creating an urban community where restaurants stay open later and where there's activity on weekends," said Ullman, who is responsible for leasing the Healey Building.

Both residents and tenants of the Healey Building are glad Fleurs de Lis and the building's other restaurant, the Loaf and Kettle, are open for business. VSA Arts of Georgia, a nonprofit art gallery displaying works by disabled and low-income individuals, occupies the space directly across from Fleurs de Lis, and Jay Tribby, the gallery's executive director and a Healey resident, thinks the restaurant could draw gallery-goers.

The menu at Fleurs de Lis, which Robinson designed, has both classic French fare as well as French-inspired items with his spin. Current best sellers include the pumpkin ravioli, the croque monsieur (a hot ham and cheese sandwich) and Robinson's jazzed-up version of tuna fish.

Robinson works about 70 hours a week and doesn't like to talk shop when he's not working.

"When I close the door, I'm done," he said, drawing a line in the air with his hand. "I have to separate the two." His kids help. At home, Robinson's children, two girls, 15 and 16, and a boy, 11, aren't that fond of daddy's cooking. His paying customers have proven easier to please. "We have nice ambiance in a beautiful building," Robinson said. "I hope people enjoy and appreciate it."