

IOWA CITY

Family to open restaurant in growing part of town

Will offer fresh, regional ingredients at low prices

By Gigi Wood

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Those who remember Bushnell's Turtle might have a new lunch spot.

Bushnell's Turtle was a downtown Iowa City deli open from 1976 to 1994. Its soups and sandwiches are still talked about in the area, so much so that a cookbook of recipes from the restaurant was published in 2008.

Her Soup Kitchen, a new deli opening by the end of September a few blocks south of the pedestrian mall, will feature menu items similar to Bushnell's, the owner said.

"It will be very much like that, very homespun, everything was made fresh everyday," said Barb Farnsworth, owner of Her Soup Kitchen.

The new deli will be a family affair. Ms. Farnsworth will create and cook the soups. Her husband, Dick Farnsworth, is closing his business Farnsworth Automotive Air, to work in the kitchen.

"He takes grilling a step further," she said.

Their son, Jason Farnsworth, recently returned to Iowa after working in the restaurant business in San Francisco for 10 years, for companies such as Sellers Markets.

"We were hoping to open this summer so we could celebrate tomatoes and the spring mixes that were out," he said.



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Her Soup Kitchen, 625 S. Dubuque St., will open later this month. The family-run restaurant will serve soups and sandwiches using fresh ingredients from local purveyors.

"So we're rethinking the menu for the fall. We're going to start getting more hearty, so veggie-wise you've got a lot of squashes, a lot of root vegetables, the last bit of the corn, the tomatoes, they will be roasted with flair; meats we'll probably be using a lot of turkey, ham, sirloin. It's going to be a simple menu; it's not going to be pages and pages."

Their daughter, Krista Farnsworth, is finishing her business degree at the University of Iowa and will soon take over the accounting and similar tasks at the restaurant, after working at Paul's Discount for a decade.

The family is completing a massive renovation to the 60-year-old building at

625 S. Dubuque St., which for many years housed Pyramid Services. Converting the structure into an American with Disabilities Act-compliant building has taken a lot of work, mostly widening doorways and in the process the family has ripped away old sheet rock to reveal the gas station's original windows. They plan to cut the facade to access the windows and allow more natural light into the building.

When it opens, Her Soup Kitchen will feature a simple menu of local, in-season ingredients for prices below \$10.

"We're keeping our numbers down so people can eat organic or sustainable everyday without making it a special

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treat and without having to go with the dollar menu at McDonald's," Mr. Farnsworth said.

To start, the deli will be open for breakfast and lunch, from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. The deli will feature daily specials to keep people coming back everyday, which it will advertise on chalkboards outside of the building.

"It's going to be that local café that you can come down to where we know your name, your kid's birthday, that sort of thing," he said.

Ingredients will come from Iowa during the warm months and when winter comes, the family hopes to procure foods from the Midwest and throughout the country, but not internationally. The ultimate goal is create a greenhouse where the family can grow their own foods year-round.

"So we're not going to be serving asparagus in the middle of the winter from Chile," Jason Farnsworth said. "I'd rather serve local food. We will source as much as we can from the Midwest and down through the Gulf (of Mexico) area."

That sentiment is prevalent in every aspect of the business. They are recycling and reusing as much material as possible in the renovation of the building. Food waste will be composted and used in the future greenhouse.

"This is all about nourishing the neighborhood and doing things local," Ms. Farnsworth said.

The deli concept is the brainchild of Ms. Farnsworth, who started her web site, www.hersoupkitchen.com and applied for her sales tax permit five years ago. Since then, she has been collecting restaurant equipment at auctions. When the family garage was filled to capacity with the items, she quit her 15-year-long job at PIP Printing and looked for a vacant space. When she found the Dubuque Street location, she convinced her son to come home and help her open the business.

They do not plan to offer catering, but are willing to make several steak sandwiches for patrons watching football games at the Club Car bar next door.

Some menu items, like wild boar,

may scare away eaters accustomed to burgers and fries, but Mr. Farnsworth promises dishes that will be approachable. A classic BLT, for example, might be made at Her Soup Kitchen with aioli instead of mayonnaise and dressed greens instead of iceberg lettuce.

"We're taking everyday meals to the next level, we'll have meatloaf sandwiches, steak sandwiches, chicken salad sandwiches, but it's not going to be your 'slop it on' kind of sandwich. It's going to be with better flavors and not done in an intimidating way," he said.

Drinks will come from a beverage supplier that carries Dad's Root Beer, juices, iced teas and lemonades. The family has no plans to carry Coca-Cola or Pepsi products, unless there is high customer demand.

There will be some seating in the deli, which will be decorated with local art and images of Iowa farm fields at harvest time. The focus will be more grab-and-go, they said. **CBJ**