

# Three Layers helps to revive Springfield

## Coffee shop does so well, owners plan to franchise

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JACKSONVILLE — When Jeff Wright and Shawn McGuire opened a coffee house in Springfield less than two years ago, they had no restaurant experience, very little extra cash and no ideas about how successful Three Layers would be.

Their business, which now also includes a beer and wine bar and space that can be rented out for meetings and special occasions, has grown threefold. And, while the two say they are still working out all the kinks in their business model, they are also starting to make preliminary plans to one day franchise the concept.

“There’s definitely a bigger picture,” McGuire said. “When the time is right, it will happen.”

McGuire, a 15-year veteran of the real estate and construction industry, knew he really wanted to open a real estate agency and Wright, who worked for 20 years as a radiologic technician before quitting last year to manage Three Layers full time, knew he really wanted to open a coffee house.

The two, who lived in Atlanta and Orlando before moving to Jacksonville, considered cities all over the state before settling on the Jacksonville neighborhood of Springfield.

Their first goal was to find a home and place for McGuire’s real estate agency, Dwellings, A Real Estate Company, but when Wright saw the 3,500-square-foot building tucked away in a residential neighborhood at 1602

Walnut St., he immediately envisioned Three Layers.

The two bought the building for \$250,000 in December 2007 and divided the space into a small temporary apartment, a small office for Dwellings and the coffee house, which took up the majority of the building when it opened in April 2008.

“It was really scary,” McGuire said. “But we’ve always followed our hearts.”

It hasn’t been easy. Business was slow at first, McGuire said, until he took marketing into his own hands by delivering an untold number of flyers to surrounding businesses and homes. While sales have grown, so have costs. The two have since bought a more traditional single-family home blocks away to expand the space at Three Layers. McGuire said nearly all the revenue at the coffee house is being reinvested.

But after taking some tips from a book he read called “E-Myth,” McGuire and Wright have started implementing systems for everything from the recipes to customer service that they hope will one day be used to reproduce Three Layers. Already the two have been approached, they said, by half a dozen prospective buyers who want to open a second location, but they don’t yet have a time frame to open or a franchisee they are willing to sell to.

Three Layers is one of at least four different locally owned and operated restaurants that have opened recently on or near Main Street. City Kidz Ice Cream Café



Shawn McGuire, a real estate and construction veteran, and Jeff Wright, a radiologic technician, have followed their passions at Three Layers in Springfield.

opened last summer and Uptown Market & Deli in the fall as part of the Cesery Cos.’ \$6 million mixed-use Third & Main project that includes 36 extended-stay residential units for patients at the University of Florida Proton Therapy Institute at Shands Jacksonville.

Tony Allegretti, a veteran restaurateur and one of the partners in Uptown Market & Deli, said restaurants are an important part of Springfield as a whole.

“Opening a retail/restaurant business is for the adventurous, but it can have major payoffs beyond cash,” Allegretti said. “No one will become a millionaire setting up shop in Springfield, but like Three Layers, all of our partners live in Springfield and we all benefit from the improved quality of life our businesses bring.”

Wafaa and Mike Alabed

opened the Mediterranean restaurant Wafaa & Mike’s at Sixth and Main streets about eight months ago.

The couple decided to open the restaurant after unsuccessfully trying to lease the space attached to their 9-year-old A&A Auto Diagnostic Repair Center Inc. It’s a common problem in Springfield, Mike Alabed said, not being able to find business owners willing to open because of misconceptions about the area.

Despite that, he said sales at the restaurant have grown steadily over the months by word-of-mouth advertising. The customer base has grown from the Springfield and greater Downtown areas to all reaches of Jacksonville.

“You have to take a risk,” Alabed said of the venture. “You have to really try.”