

Oct. 15, 2009

Crain's Chicago Business

Real Estate Exec Plans Bar in Old Town

By Andrew Schroedter

(Crain's) — The owners of popular North Side watering holes Kirkwood Bar & Grill and Schoolyard Tavern & Grill plan a new location in Old Town.

Four Corners Tavern Group Inc. expects to start construction next month at 1508 N. Wells St., intending to open an as-yet-unnamed sports bar in May, says Andy Gloor, a real estate executive and co-founder of the Chicago-based company, which has six locations.

Four Corners paid nearly \$1.8 million for the site, which includes a single-story building and an adjacent parking lot. The seller was developer Daniel Levin, chairman of Habitat Co., which had a brokerage office in the building until 2007.

The new bar will be on a strip that for many years has been dominated by old-line restaurants such as O'Brien's Restaurant & Bar, Orso's Restaurant and Topo Gigio Ristorante. Although the recession has forced dozens of eateries throughout the city to shut down, Four Corners' moderately priced menu of hamburgers, salads and sandwiches could appeal to a new brand of consumer that's hesitant to splurge on expensive wines and steak dinners.

"No one is going out to white-tablecloth lunches and dinners right now," says Megan Covert, a leasing consultant with Chicago-based brokerage Stone Real Estate Corp., which wasn't involved in the transaction.

And Mr. Gloor points to restaurateur Jerry Kleiner's recently opened 33 Club, 1419 N. Wells St., as evidence that new nightspots can gain a foothold in the neighborhood.

"It's a strip that needs some new stuff," says Mr. Gloor, a principal with Chicago-based real estate investor Sterling Bay Cos.

On Wells Street, Four Corners plans to demolish the existing structure to build a new restaurant. The Chicago-based firm acquired the building and parking lot Sept. 4, financing the acquisition and planned construction with a nearly \$2.8-million loan from Gold Coast Bank, property records show.

The existing building housed an office of Habitat's brokerage arm until 2007, when Mr. Levin sold the unit to Chicago-based residential brokerage Baird & Warner Inc. Baird moved out of this summer.

Mr. Levin, who owned the property for nearly 15 years, was traveling and unavailable for comment, an assistant said.

Mr. Gloor started Four Corners in 2001 with Matthew Menna, a vice-president at William Blair & Co. That was the year they bought Schoolyard Tavern & Grill. Four Corners, a sidelight venture for Messrs. Gloor and Menna, also owns Gaslight Bar & Grille, 2426 N. Racine Ave., and WestEnd Bar & Grill, 1326 W. Madison St.

Kirkwood is at 2934 N. Sheffield Ave.; Schoolyard is blocks away, at 3258 N. Southport Ave.