

Downtown New Bedford's third restaurant and nightlife resurgence

When it comes to restaurants and bars, downtown New Bedford is the heart of the South Coast. Amazing seafood, talented artists and amazing musicians draw hundreds of visitors downtown daily, especially on weekends.

It wasn't always like that.

There was a time when downtown New Bedford had a seedy reputation. From the 1970's through the 1990's, downtown New Bedford was a place known for nightlife and crime. It wasn't a place to spend the day or feel safe walking the streets at night. Today, New Bedford is a place tourist ships drop off 100's of passengers and we have dozens of festivals and concerts throughout the year. Why the change?

In 1996, 34 acres of downtown New Bedford became an historic park. Downtown was baptized, cleansing all its past sins and the "open for business" sign was laid out for business minded people to see.

In my mind, this sparked the first restaurant and nightlife resurgence that started in the decade of the new millennium. In 2002, a tiny little spot called No Problemo opened their doors in the old Peanut Shoppe spot on the corner of Purchase and William streets. In 2008, Kevin Santos transformed a dump site into the Waterfront Grille and in 2009 Pour Farm Tavern opened its doors introducing a long list of micro-brews to downtown. Freestone's fantastic new owners ensured the place was popping daily.



Pour Farm Tavern outdoor seating.

Places like Rose Alley, Cork, Hibernia, Izzy's Restaurant, Spicy Lime, Destination Soups and Slainte (the old Catwalk) opened in the same decade (or near that time). Downtown New Bedford was now the micro-brew capital of southern, MA with plenty of choices to grab a fantastic meal. Travessia ensured that we have some of the best wines to choose from in the world.

The second resurgence of restaurants downtown started in the last few years with Tia Maria's European Cafe, Brick Oven Pizza, Destination Soups, Portobello (in its new location), The Black Whale, Ming Sushi, Pier 37 (formerly Fins), Whaling City Diner, DNB Burgers and most recently Whaler's Tavern. No other place south of Boston can claim so many fantastic restaurants and night life spots packed into such a dense area.

This brings us to the third resurgence or next wave of businesses that will be opening at the end of 2016 or in 2017.

At the end of June, New Bedford Guide announced plans for a **10-barrel brewery and restaurant** on 52 Union Street located in between Slainte and the YMCA. The Moby Dick Brewing Co. will have an all-star cast of owners to include Richard Lafrance of Lafrance Hospitality and Bob Unger the former editor and associate publisher of The Standard-Times. New Bedford beer will be back.

Shortly after the announcement of The Moby Dick Brewing Co., I learned about the **Greasy Luck Brewery** that will be opening in the old Whaling Museum Research Library on 791 Purchase St. The facility is HUGE and promises to be a brewery, live entertainment venue and unique function space. Another all-star list of owners; Christian Farland (Owner Farland Corporation, Inc.), Mark Martinho (Antonio's Restaurant) and Al Peters (Rose Alley Ale House and Cork). More New Bedford beer and a place for consistent live bands. We haven't had a large music venue downtown like this since Krickets.

News always seems to come in threes, right? It was recently announced that the vacant **Candleworks restaurant will be transformed into Carmine's Italian Ristorante**. The owner of The Black Whale purchased the building last year and plans to serve high-end Italian food.

Mayor Jon Mitchell likes to say, "New Bedford is on the rise." I'd say that is true, especially when it comes to downtown New Bedford being the food and entertainment hub of the south coast, MA area. If New Bedford continues to connect the waterfront to downtown, I could see New Bedford being an alternate choice, and eventually a better choice, to Newport, Cape Cod or Martha's Vineyard in the Summer time with better food, beer and entertainment without the traffic and crowds.