

LOCAL NEWS



Preventive steps

Aurora shooting prompts Sycamore police, Chamber to host safety event / 4

LOCAL NEWS

Homicide suspect

Kane, DeKalb county police were mum on death investigation / 10

SPORTS



New leadership

DeKalb defensive coordinator to move into head coach position / 16

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PAPPAS' VISION

Developer says Tavern on Lincoln is set to open early May / 3

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TODAY'S WEATHER



HIGH 31 **LOW 16**

Cloudy, with a high near 31. North winds 5 to 10 mph.

Complete forecast on page 7

'It's hard work, that's what it is'

John and Foti Pappas talk Tavern on Lincoln, set to open early May

By **KELSEY RETTKE**
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DeKALB – Foti Pappas, 30, walked along the sidewalk of Lincoln Highway on a cold afternoon Thursday in downtown DeKalb with the briskness that only comes from Chicago living.

He's in the process of moving back to DeKalb from Chicago, where he went to school, and he was appointed vice president of development in the family business, Pappas Development this summer. Foti, 30, seemed positively eager to show off the Cornerstone DeKalb and Plaza DeKalb buildings, and the hard work that's made his dad, John Pappas, 59, a known name in DeKalb and Sycamore.

"My father came from Greece when he was 11 years old," Foti Pappas said, standing in what will be the 140-seat dining area of the impending Tavern on Lincoln, 124 E. Lincoln Highway, set for an early May opening.

The tavern's construction is ongoing, and the kitchen, plumbing and electrical features are well on their way, Foti Pappas said. Brick walls will be going up by next week, he said.

'We're invested in this community'

Foti Pappas, whose office is on the first level of the residential portion of Cornerstone DeKalb – a 51-unit, high-end apartment complex, which currently has eight vacancies, he said – elaborated on his dad's hustle over the years.

"He washed a lot of dishes and moved his way up," Foti Pappas said. "When you're hungry, willing to work and you got the smarts, it kind of comes together."

John Pappas said Pappas Development – which operates as a developer and a general contractor – employs only local workers, about 150, including plumbers, electricians, dry-wallers and other trade jobs. The tavern will employ 40 to 45 people, from managers, servers, bartenders and kitchen, prep and cleaning staff.

"They showed up to this country in debt," Foti Pappas said of his immigrant parents. "It's not like you hear the story of 'I showed up with two nickels in my pocket.' They didn't have those nickels. It's hard work, that's what it is. And being smart."

'We chose to be here'

Foti Pappas, who was born in DeKalb, has seemingly inherited his father's work ethic. He's in the process of moving back from Chicago, where he worked



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Foti Pappas talks Thursday in Tavern on Lincoln at Cornerstone DeKalb about some of the plans for the Pappas-led development projects going on in DeKalb. Pappas said they are shooting for a May opening for Tavern on Lincoln.

“He washed a lot of dishes and moved his way up. When you're hungry, willing to work, and you got the smarts, it kind of comes together.”

Foti Pappas, on his father, John Pappas

for six years as a real estate consultant. He lives with his wife, Penelope, and their 11-month-old son, Yianni, named after first-time-grandpa, John.

"We choose to be here," Foti Pappas said. "We're invested in this community. When [my parents] came over [to the states], they were so paranoid about fitting in that they changed the Yiannis to Johns. So we wanted to kind of go back to Yianni."

John Pappas said he'll invite all the community, especially Northern Illinois University folks, to an upcoming

soft opening, although no date has been set. The tavern will serve contemporary American cuisine with a "local twist." Foti Pappas said the specifics of the menu are a surprise.

"This community's been great to me and my family over the years," John Pappas said. "I raised my family in this community, and I'm always the local guy that's always going to support the local businesses and local subcontractors. We have such quality people around this area, so no reason for me to look anywhere else but the DeKalb-Sycamore area."

All business

It was apparent that John Pappas prefers talking business over personal matters, but what's equally apparent is his nose-to-the-grindstone passion for evolving downtown DeKalb.

"Downtown DeKalb has always been amazing, but the last few years, a little bit of things have changed because the drop of enrollment in the university," he said. "But now, the trend is down-

town. All towns get turned around and re-energized with high-end, multi-mixed buildings, residential and commercial. That's how you're going to bring these towns back."

The key here is accessibility, Foti Pappas said. Cornerstone DeKalb, the Plaza – they're all within walking distance of restaurants, cafes, shopping and bars. His father agrees.

"People's lifestyles have changes," John Pappas said. "When I was growing up, you get married, you buy a house. Those days are gone. The younger generations, my kids' age, your priority is not to buy a house. You want to live in a clean environment, and travel and spend money, and pay off student loans."

John Pappas said he is trying to create a hub of economic development in that two-block span of Lincoln Highway.

"This is going to be an extremely unique space," Foti Pappas said. "It's going to be suited to the entire community, and a comfortable place to come grab a good meal, a good drink and meet with friends at the local tavern."