

# The Berkshire Eagle

## Jae aims to add his flavor to Spice

Plans call for the menu to be a mix of styles, but the eatery will be less expensive

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### Sushi Spice

#### Will Jae's Spice succeed?

Thursday, May 29 PITTSFIELD — Roy Krantz was Jae Chung's second customer when he opened his first restaurant in the South End of Boston 18 years ago.

The pair reconnected two years ago when Krantz and his partner purchased the former A.H. Rice Silk Mill on Spring Street.

When Krantz heard that Spice restaurant on North Street had closed three months ago, he encouraged his old friend to speak with co-owners Lawrence M. Rosenthal and Joyce S. Bernstein. The quartet met at Bernstein's office on North Street in April and, after a nearly five-hour meeting, a partnership was formed.

"My initial instinct with people that I meet is to try and get them together," Krantz said yesterday. "It's one of the few things that I'm good at. And it

worked."

That's how Chung, who owns restaurants in Boston, Brookline and Williamstown, got together with Rosenthal and Bernstein to form Jae's Spice, which plans to open at the site of the old Spice at 297 North St. in July.

"He said, 'Just get together with Larry and Joyce, maybe something will work out,' " Chung, who grew up in North Adams, said yesterday. "We didn't plan to do it. ... It just happened."

Chung said on Tuesday that he hopes to open the first week in July; a source familiar with the restaurant deal said yesterday that an exact date has not been set. Bernstein could not be reached for comment yesterday while Rosenthal declined to comment.

According to Chung, the new eatery won't be as posh as the previous one. A source said the service won't be as formal, and most of the white tablecloths will be gone. Food will also be available in both of the restaurant's rooms.

"It will be a kind of fun, casual place," Chung said.

"I'm very excited about the whole concept," he added. "Hopefully, I can bring the locals in."

The new restaurant will offer a blend of items from Spice's old menu and the pan-Asian cuisine that Chung serves in his other restaurants, including sushi and dishes from the Korean, Thai, Japanese and Chinese traditions, Chung said.

Chung said he is working with Spice's former executive chef Douglas Luf — who will also be part of the new restaurant — to blend the two cuisines together.

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"I blend quite a bit," said Chung, a native of South Korea who graduated from Drury High School and attended Berkshire Community College.

Spice, which opened in 2006, closed in March due to financial problems that Rosenthal said at the time resulted in losses of \$1.2 million. The restaurant turned a profit in only four of the 22 months it was open — during July and August of 2006 and 2007.

Mayor James M. Ruberto could not be reached for comment yesterday; City Council President Gerald M. Lee said he was pleased that Spice will reopen.

"I think it's terrific," he said. "It should have kind of a niche on North Street, which is kind of nice. I kind of noticed it missing during the first Third Thursday (on May 15). ... There's nothing worse than an unoccupied space."

The City Council in February 2005 approved a tax relief package for Bernstein and Rosenthal's company that eased Spice's property tax bill for 11 years. Under the terms of that agreement, Spice was required to pay the city \$16,000 annually in property taxes, based on the assessed value of the former Besse-Clark department store building at that time, and did not have to pay taxes on any improvements to the building.

Ann Dobrowolski, of Pittsfield's Department of Community Development, said it is too early to tell if the terms of the previous agreement will change.

Under the requirements of the deal, Bernstein and Rosenthal's company, Two Seven Three North Street, will be required to file its yearly fiscal report with the city on June 30, which is the end of the current fiscal year.

While many of Spice's former employees lost their jobs when the restaurant closed three months ago,

others were moved to its sister North Street eatery, Burger, Rosenthal said in March.

According to a source, most of the former Spice's staff have already found employment elsewhere, while some have indicated a desire to return. Some of those employees will be brought back, the source said.

Yvonne Pearson, the executive director of Downtown Inc., said the organization is happy that the doors will reopen.

"We've all had our fingers crossed that we would see some activity there before we got too far into the summer season," Pearson said. "I had confidence in the two of them that it would happen.

"I didn't expect it this soon," she said. "But knowing Joyce and Larry as I do, they don't let the grass grow under their feet."

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