


Success of Superior Motors after one year 'demonstrates Braddock is a destination'



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JUL 30, 2018

6:52 AM

On what some thought would be the one-year anniversary of its failing, Superior Motors in Braddock is humming along on all cylinders.

Even before the 80-seat restaurant across the street from Edgar Thomson Works celebrated its first birthday on July 15, it was named one of the best new restaurants of 2018 in the country by Food & Wine magazine. Chef Kevin Sousa's exquisite modern

American cuisine also has earned accolades from The New York Times.



In the process, the restaurant has created traffic jams on a once-desolate stretch of Braddock Avenue and put much-needed tax dollars into the borough's coffers. It has made it less scary for others to do business there, too.



Patrons walk to Superior Motors in Braddock Thursday evening.
(Nate Guidry/Post-Gazette)

Just down the street, Crazy Mocha is developing a cafe and other food operations in the long-vacant Cuda Building. Brew Gentlemen continues to go gangbusters. The Mexican food truck Brassero now shares a home with Studebaker Metals in several connected structures that once housed the Braddock Free Press newspaper and Guentert's Bakery. And just this month, Kristen

Michaels of Edgewood and Gisele Fetterman, the wife of Braddock Mayor John Fetterman, opened The Hollander, an incubator and co-working space for local women entrepreneurs in the old Hollander pharmacy building.

“Things are happening,” says Patrick Jordan, whose Barebones Black Box theater shares space with Superior Motors in a former Chevrolet dealership.

“It’s been a triple win for everyone,” John Fetterman agrees. “It demonstrates Braddock is a destination.”



Kevin Sousa, owner of Superior Motors, front, and sous chef Jack Martin, prepare dishes in the Braddock restaurant.
(Nate Guidry/Post-Gazette)

Pittsburghers might have doubted that the restaurant would succeed in such an unlikely location. Investor Gregg Kander, an attorney from Squirrel Hill who ended up raising money needed to get the project back on track after some bad press and countless construction problems, says he, too, would have hesitated but for the restaurant’s social mission.

In addition to hiring locals and giving borough residents 50 percent off meals, Mr. Sousa made good on his promised career training for Braddock townspeople. Four residents are taking part in a nine-month program that started in January, and he hopes to have an even bigger class next year.

“It fills my heart that it’s really working,” Mr. Kander says. “You just see diversity. And the staff has learned skills and” and has opportunities to go to other places.”

Superior Motors has dished up some pretty impressive meals in the process. The late Anthony Bourdain included it in a Pittsburgh episode of “Parts Unknown” on CNN, and Food & Wine magazine honored the restaurant in April.

Mr. Sousa never doubted it would be a success because of its history-making Kickstarter campaign in January 2014, which raised more than \$310,000 in 33 days. That’s even when building problems put the brakes on construction — it took three years — and drove up the cost to \$1 million.

“What we’re doing is so ballsy [that] people just want to see it,” says Mr. Sousa, 44.

Most restaurants, he says, see their numbers level off after the initial hype of opening. Superior Motors does upward of 700

covers in a week, and many of his guests are repeat customers. Most are locals, but it's not uncommon for some diners to drive more than a hour to get there; just last week, a couple drove in from Annapolis, Md., for dinner.

The restaurant's success, Braddock Council President Tina Doose says, has helped to shed a different light on the community.

"It's made it more inviting to some who would never have thought of it as a place for dinner," the longtime resident says. And it's added to the town's growing artistic and cultural vibe, drawing newcomers into the community."

Now, she adds, "investors know that Braddock exists."

Count Mr. Kander among them. For his second project, he's remodeling the former Ohringer's furniture store building at Seventh Street and Braddock Avenue into housing for 35 artists. He also is raising money to create studio space and programs for artists in a second location.

"There's a lot of buzz along Braddock Avenue, and Superior Motors was key in that," he says.

Most of the Barebones' audience eats at the restaurant before or after seeing a show, so for Mr. Jordan, it has been an especially good reciprocal relationship.

"We have each other's backs and a true appreciation for what makes each business special," he says.

The restaurant will celebrate its one-year anniversary Tuesday in its new courtyard with a "gratitude" party from 6 to 11:30 p.m. Tickets cost \$65, and will include tacos and wood-roasted clams and mussels, multiple live music acts and a water-balloon toss. A portion of the proceeds will benefit the Braddock Free Store, which was opened by Gisele Fetterman.

It precedes another neighborhood celebration. On Braddock Community Day on Aug. 11, the Braddock Civic Plaza at the intersection of Braddock Avenue and Fourth Street officially will open with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 11 a.m. Equipped with free Wi-Fi and tables and chairs, the 1.1-acre green space will serve as a gathering space for residents and will accommodate farmers markets, food trucks and music shows.

Despite Superior Motor's meteoric rise, Mr. Sousa has no plans to further expand or open a second restaurant. His only goal, he says, is to build equity and make guests' dining experiences even better.

Leading a tour of the new courtyard, which houses the Braddock Community Bread Oven along with outdoor seating for the restaurant, the chef reflects on the past year. He still gets choked up when he steps outside after dark, he says, and watches as hot blue flames shoot from the steel mill's smokestacks into the night sky.

"I feel instantly transported to another time," he says.

The backdrop of the hulking, belching mill, he concedes, might not be for everyone. But those who get it probably also feel chills.

"We worked really hard. More than ever, I'm proud to be part of it," he says.

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