

THE REAL DEAL

Two years after crane collapse, East Side restaurant resurfaces

May 25, 2010 04:00PM

By Candace Taylor



When a collapsing crane crushed his newly renovated restaurant in March 2008, "it was a nightmare," said Brian Owens, the co-owner of Crave Ceviche.

The popular East Side restaurant, helmed by chef Todd Mitgang and located at 946 Second Avenue between 50th and 51st streets, was less than a year old at the time of the crane collapse. Due in part to legal struggles with their landlord, it has been closed ever since the high-profile accident. The crane collapse killed seven people (no one who was in the restaurant, Owens said) and prompted the resignation of city Department of Buildings Commissioner Patricia Lancaster.

But more than two years later, Crave has finally found a new home. Owens said he and co-owner Dino Andreakos this week reached an agreement to purchase a vacant four-story townhouse which previously housed another restaurant on the first floor, Owens said. And the best part is, it's located just across Second Avenue from Crave's old location.

"It's anyone's dream," Owens said. Not only will they be able to stay in the neighborhood, but the new space will be twice the size. Plus, "anyone who owns their own restaurant would love to be their own landlord," he said.

Owens said he preferred not to disclose the new address until the deal closes, but said he's hoping to start construction by September first and reopen by next spring. The first floor of the building will house the main part of the restaurant, with a party room on the second floor. The upper floors will be residential apartments, which the owners will either rent out or use for employees.

At the time of the accident, Crave had just gotten a flurry of press, including a mention in Maxim magazine the same month as the crane collapse. Business was so good that Owens had expanded into an adjacent space, completing the renovation only two weeks before the accident.

The owners had carefully selected their location because of the heavy mid-day lunch traffic, and because Crave -- which earned kudos for its lobster rolls and spicy yellowfin tuna -- stood out in an area mostly

dominated by Irish pubs.

"We brought something creative to the area," he said. "Everything was great."

The accident changed all that. With the building half-destroyed by the falling crane, the owners kept the website active and vowed to rebuild.

"We said we were going to reopen it exactly where we were, so we could pick up where we left off," Owens said. But the landlord, Ascot Properties, wanted to demolish the building, and the two parties went to court.

When a judge ordered the landlord not to demolish the building, the restaurant received a settlement.

"Our clients couldn't be happier," said attorney **Adam Leitman Bailey**, whose firm represented Crave. "They were given an incredible offer they couldn't refuse. That allowed them to take time off and set up a new restaurant that will be better than ever."

Crave, along with other businesses, is still involved in several other lawsuits resulting from the crane collapse.

Owen said he's especially happy to be staying in "the area we loved and were loved by our customers," and which has been hard-hit by the crane collapse.

Two years after closing, he said, the restaurant's inbox is still being flooded with e-mails from customers wondering when it will reopen.

"Just wanted to say that you are missed in the neighborhood and I sincerely hope that you will be able to re-open in the very near future," read one recent e-mail.

"My husband and I still talk about your restaurant and how much we miss it," wrote another.