

# Smiths Public House opens in Cohoes

BY STEVE BARNES



Dionne Puerto / Smiths Public House

The bar at Smiths Public House in Cohoes, which celebrated its reopening Monday, is nearly 50 feet long, made of African mahogany and was sourced from the headquarters of Tammany Hall in New York City. The restaurant will serve lunch and dinner seven days a week.

COHOES — Smiths Public House, a revival of a historic restaurant name that dates back almost a century on Remsen Street, reopened Monday.

The owner is Rob Tario, a co-owner of the three-location Topsy Moose Tap & Tavern. The managing partner is Simon Ottendorf, a Topsy Moose bartender and manager since the first one opened six years ago in Latham.

Tario described the menu as elevated pub fare, including full dinner entrees. The bar has nine beer taps, a full liquor license and a cocktail list inspired by the retro feel of the lounge area and bar.

Kitchen hours are 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday to Wednesday, until 11 p.m. Thursday to Saturday, with the bar open later as warranted, Tario said. There are about 30 employees. The restaurant seats approximately 100. Tario said he is discussing options for outdoor dining with the city.

He said his goal was to restore rather than renovate the interior, rich with dark wood, new paint and lighting, a large working fireplace in the lounge and a nearly 50-foot-long bar of African mahogany that once was installed in the headquarters of the Tammany Hall political organization in New York City.

“We kept more than 80 percent of what was there,” Tario said. “It was important to keep it a lot like people remembered it.” Among the changes was the removal of the apostrophe from the Smiths name, which was not on the original wooden sign but was added when an awning was put up.

The building, at 171 Remsen St., has been an entertainment and dining spot for nearly 150 years and, as Smith’s Restaurant, for decades was a legendary hangout for the Albany County Democratic machine. It was purchased in early 2022 by developer Daniel Oh, whose real estate firm, Capital Companies NY, has invested millions of dollars in about two dozen Cohoes properties over the past six years, including four others on Remsen Street. Oh bought the building and the Smiths name from David Hostig, owner of Normanside Country Club in Bethlehem. Hostig took over Smith’s from his late father, Joseph Hostig, the owner from 2008 until his 2019 death.

Tario first toured the restaurant late last year.

“You just feel the history. It was so beautiful that I knew I wanted to bring it back,” he said. He signed the lease in February.

Speaking of Tario, Oh said in March, “He is really the ideal operator, (with) the passion and experience to bring Smith’s back.”

Tario has been a partner in Ship’s Pub in Albany since its 2011 opening and sole owner for almost two years. In 2016, Tario and partner Brendan Brader opened the first location of Tippy Moose, a bar that became immensely popular based in part on the strength of indulgences including deep-fried grilled cheese sandwiches and 12 variations of mac-n-cheese. There are now Tippy Mooses in Albany, Troy and Colonie, with a sibling concept called Tippy Taco Cantina being developed in Latham for an August opening. Brader is not involved with Smiths, Tario said. He initially planned to open it as sole proprietor but later brought on Ottendorf as a partner to run daily operations.

Oh said he considered multiple suitors for the Smiths project, including three seriously. He consulted with City Hall on the best choice, according to Cohoes Mayor Bill Keeler, who said in a statement in March, “We intentionally set the bar very high. In Rob Tario we welcome exactly the kind of talent and experience we held out for.” As an inducement to prospective operators, Oh offered a year’s free rent. Tario declined to specify the cost of the four-month restoration, calling it “a pretty penny.”

John McDonald, a member of the state Assembly, owner of Marra’s Pharmacy on Remsen Street, former Cohoes mayor and a resident of the city, said in March that the revival of Smiths adds another important part to the redevelopment of Cohoes, which earlier this year was awarded \$10 million in state Downtown Revitalization Initiative funds.

“Smith’s has been the heart and soul of downtown Cohoes for several generations,” McDonald said in a statement. “Rob and his team’s arrival to downtown is exciting on many fronts.”