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FEATURED

Lewisville Feed Mill redevelopment progresses

Heather M. Goodwin, hgoodwin@starlocalmedia.com Jan 26, 2016



Jim Murray, owner of Prairie House Restaurant, plans to redevelop the Lewisville Feed Mill into a steakhouse. The building is one of the city's oldest buildings dating back to the 1920s. It remained in business for 124 years before closing.

After sitting vacant and unowned for more than five years, a new developer has bought the Lewisville Feed Mill and since has been busy redeveloping it - trying to keep the building's history alive.

Jim Murray, owner of Prairie House Restaurant, a Texas-style eatery in Aubrey, purchased the property Nov. 6. In the more than two months since the sale was final, Murray and his crew took two weeks to clean the building.

"It was quite a cleanup. We filled dumpsters with dust and dirt that came out of the feed mill," Murray said. "But that's the nature of the beast. We've been working constantly. We have a crew working there right now."



The Lewisville Feed Mill closed in October 2010 after 124 years in business when then-owner James Polser retired. Polser bought the feed mill from his uncle James Degan in 1978. It was founded as the Lewisville Feed Mill Livery Stable in 1886 by Polser's great-grandfather J.W. Degan.

Inheriting that much history isn't intimidating, Murray said.

"I see it as a challenge and honor to redevelop the feed mill. I want to save it for what it was," Murray said. "I love to repurpose things, and I like old things. I'm trying to be respectful about the building and keep it as original as I can."

However, after inspecting the entire property, Murray said the whole building will have to be gone through and given "some TLC." He is busy working on a new roof and adding insulation. He also learned that the building's three-brick width architecture is drilled about six feet into the ground. He said shifts in the building's foundation have caused cracked walls that will need to be replaced.

Murray plans to take down the brick walls and rebuild with the same type of brick.

“Everything we’re doing so far won’t affect the visual inside; instead it will bring the feed mill back up to speed,” Murray said. “We will have to put in some steel to support the roof, but it will go with the decor.”

Murray hired Bill Peck as the architect. He said Peck has a “vested interest” in maintaining the essence of the feed mill.

Murray said the reception from other old town business owners has been positive.

“Most are excited, and some think I’m crazy – and they may prove to be right,” Murray said. “I’m looking forward to having good relationship with them.”

Murray grew up in Farmers Branch, but he said he used to do business at the Lewisville Feed Mill. He also has previous experience redeveloping historic properties.



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"I've done this kind of thing before, so it being such a unique piece of property seemed to make a lot of sense for me to buy it," Murray said. "It was a real motivation to sell to me since I wasn't going to bulldoze the building."

City Manager Donna Barron said city officials are "really excited" about the project.

"We're very pleased that he wants to work with us to maintain that history. We're really excited because it's not someone who bought it and wanted to tear it down," Barron said. "He wants to build and maintain the history of the feed mill and what it means to this community."

Barron said officials have been shown renderings of what the project will look like and plans for renovating the existing structure.

"We feel like it fits well into Old Town. The whole appeal of the project was its historic value," Barron said. "The Feed Mill is a strong character in Old Town, and we encourage people to preserve existing buildings."

Murray is redeveloping the historic location as the J2 Steakhouse at the Lewisville Feed Mill - partially named for himself and the previous owner, James Polser. He said it will have an agrarian-type 1930s and 1940s look.

Murray said he plans to use the same original signage from the feed mill that was built in 1926.

"I want to keep a lot of the equipment and decor," Murray said. "The feed mill is filled with a lot of things James Polser collected over the years including a 155-year-old corn grinder, a lady's side saddle and broom maker from the 1860s."

The steakhouse will be chef-driven, meaning the chef will design all the items on the menu.

While he couldn't give the name of the head chef, Murray said he is a professional chef whose previous employer includes the Ritz Carlton.



"This will be his first entourage out. I have a good relationship with him, and I plan to be real involved with the food," Murray said.

The restaurant will also feature a small bakery for baking bread and a meat room for cutting meat. Murray said it will be a "farm-to-table" type restaurant. He said customers will see some menu items from the Prairie House, but the food will be geared toward a wider audience and will include vegetarian and gluten-free options.

“The food will be the caliber of Ill Forks Steakhouse, but not those prices. It will really be something Lewisville can be proud of. It will be unique and high-quality,” Murray said. “It will be quite a different experience than other restaurants.”

The restaurant plans to employ around 50 people by the time it opens. Murray has plans for an outdoor covered and open patio to be used for live music. He said the restaurant will also feature a 75-foot bar with 36 different beers on tap.

“I’m a soft opening type of guy,” Murray said. “It’s very important to provide good service and good food, and it’s real important to take care of everyone the first time.”

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