

EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS

Buyers of Purple Cow franchise hope to grow herd

LEROY DONALD

A couple of men well-known in the food and restaurant business have acquired Continental Cuisine, the group that, over several decades, brought to Little Rock some of its finest and most popular restaurants.

The deal includes the Purple Cow diners, the only restaurant concern Continental Cuisine still operates. The two men are Todd Gold, most recently the service director and corporate chef for Axiom Corp., the data management company, and Phillip Tappan, who ran Quality Foods for years. They formed Tappan and Gold LLC to buy properties, and bought Continental Cuisine earlier this month. Gold is president and Tappan chairman and chief executive officer. Continental Cuisine is a company formed years ago by Paul Bash, a noted chef, and businessman Ed Moore. They opened such upscale and popular restaurants as Alouette's, Graffiti's and 1620 Restaurant. They also opened a shop called Pickles for a time, but it didn't last long. Their first Purple Cow, modeled after classic diners with a chrome, glass block, neon and jukebox motif, opened in 1989 at 8026 Cantrell Road on the edge of the Foxcroft neighborhood. About 12 years ago they opened a second one on burgeoning Financial Centre Parkway. A third one was opened in Searcy about that time, but never made it and was closed. The company also owns Purple Cows in Texas and Virginia. There are three in the Dallas-Fort Worth market and one in Virginia Beach with plans for another. The Texas locations were opened five or six years ago and the Virginia Beach one about four years ago, Tappan said. The purchase of Continental Cuisine includes all rights to the brand and licensee contracts, Gold said. The Purple Cow diners specialize in hamburger and blueplate fare and feature soda fountains that serve milkshakes, including a purple one. The Little Rock stores became extremely popular. Tappan and Gold said they had no plans for changing "what was obviously a good menu and good operation." About 75 people work at the two Little Rock restaurants. Gold said they hope to open another Purple Cow in the next 12 months, eventually having five or six more in next few years. They said Bash probably would be somewhat involved in the business if available, probably as a consultant. Bash is 65 and Moore is 75. "From my understanding, they have retired," Tappan said. "They did it. They've been great to work with." Tappan said he has several other interests and would work on expansion of the Purple Cow concept. Some properties need improvements, he said. "And, being from food distribution, I'll research food quality, try to tweak it, with maybe a look at some organic and natural products

that didn't exist 12 years ago." The culinary end of the business will be handled mostly by Gold. "Todd keeps me out of that end. I'm just a taster and good at it," Tappan said. Tappan, 46, and Gold, 35, have known each other for years, going back to the time Gold was a good customer of Quality Foods. They also helped found the Arkansas Culinary School, now Pulaski Technical College Arkansas Culinary School. Gold remains a director of that venture and is active in its efforts. Both come from old Arkansas families. Tappan's mother, Gloria, is a member of the Young family who owned and operated the Helena newspaper. Gold, who was born at St. Vincent Infirmary, is the son of Don Gold, whose family operated Gold's House of Fashion in downtown Little Rock for decades. Tappan came to Little Rock in 1983, where he went to work for his father-in-law Don Kirkpatrick. Kirkpatrick, who died about three years ago, had acquired Quality Poultry and Egg in the early 1950s and expanded it into Quality Foods, a \$400 million-a-year business. Tappan had become president and chief executive officer of the company by the time he retired about four years ago. His interests have been food and natural resources. "I try to spend more time in the woods, hunting and fishing and drinking water," he said with a laugh, referring to his interest in some Mountain Valley water companies. His wife, Gina, operates Foster Cochran, a gift shop in the Heights. It is not part of the Gold Tappan enterprises, he said. Gold's life has been spent in the restaurant business. In 1988, at age 16, he began working as a dishwasher at Bruno's Little Italy. He had worked his way up to being kitchen manager before leaving to go to culinary school in 1991. He was trained at the LaMaison Meridian (Memphis Culinary Academy), graduating in 1992. Since then he has worked as sous-chef and executive chef for restaurants, hotels and country clubs in the area. He has been active in culinary organizations, local and national, through the years. He also has been active in the Arkansas Hospitality Association, in 2004 receiving the association's Outstanding Chef of the Year award. In 2007 he received the Salut Au Restaurateur Award. Everybody's Business runs every Sunday in the business section of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette. Send your business news to Leroy Donald, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, P.O. Box 2221, Little Rock, Ark. 72203; or e-mail to: leroylero@att.net

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