

## Struggling St. James Square showing signs of new life

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L.J. Goldstock motioned a prospective customer late one afternoon last week to the stack of to-go menus on the counter, in an appropriate container for this "upscale barbecue joint" -- a wooden pig. "Take as many as you like," Goldstock said.

Goldstock and partner Tom Coppola recently opened their new restaurant, **LT's Grill**, in St. James Square. (The **grill** is named for the partners' first initials.) It is one of two new businesses filling once-vacant storefronts at the site. Sylvan Learning Center is set to open today next to Starbucks.

And, town officials said, there is talk of more to come as the building's new owner, Realty Equities Management, works to fill the depleted mall, including a possible small grocery in part of the former Grand Union.

Goldstock said people have asked him good questions about the site.

"The best I can tell people coming in here is Niskayuna knows about it, Schenectady knows about it and it's something that is desperately needed to fill," he said. "It's such a beautiful area. It should do very well."

The square has had some longtime tenants, but it was hit hard in 2001 when its anchor, the Grand Union supermarket, was lost to bankruptcy.

The empty spaces at the square have been periodically referenced by the group trying to keep the old Ingersoll Home site, located about three miles down Balltown Road, from being developed. They have questioned why more retail and restaurant space is needed when space there sat empty.

Realty Equities purchased the property last summer from TD Banknorth, which took it from the former owner, Reginald Scott. The purchase covered roughly half the structure, about 93,000 square feet. A portion to the east of the Grand Union could be added later.

Scott poured millions of dollars into the plaza in an attempt to keep it afloat but ultimately filed for Chapter 7 protection in U.S. Bankruptcy Court.

In August 2006, Paul Foley, president of Realty Equities, said they were contemplating changing the square's name. He did not return calls this week.

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Town officials have been pleased with the progress.

Supervisor Luke Smith said he's been told three or four other leases were in the works at the site, and the former Grand Union space could be subdivided.

"I'm confident it will be significantly filled soon," Smith said.

At the new Sylvan Learning Center site, workers were making the move Friday from the center's previous home on Union Street in Schenectady. It was expected to be open today.

The center is one of three in the area providing afterschool education and tutoring for students.

"It's very centrally located and convenient for our families in that area," regional Executive Director Cathy Hull said. "And it has great parking."

The location also provides parents with things to do while their children are being tutored, she said. Starbucks is next door, and there's also shopping nearby.

**LT's Grill** is located next to the Golden Phoenix Buffet, on the Balltown Road side, where a Blockbuster Video and before that a bagel shop once operated.

The **grill** opened Monday for dinner. Starting Monday, it also will be open for lunch during the week. Featured are Memphis-style ribs, served dry or wet.

The owners have been trying to work out the kinks this past week, but Goldstock said he's been happy with the response from locals.

"We're glad to see the new owner [of St. James] putting a lot of effort in to fill the mall up," Goldstock said. "They want us to succeed."

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