

## **Buddies in youth, partners in business**

**Niskayuna High grads' latest venture is family restaurant with Western motif**

By AMBER VAN NATTEN  
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NISKAYUNA - Tom Coppola and L.J. Goldstock, two childhood friends, have come a long way from doing yard work for their neighbors in Niskayuna.

Now, they're really cooking.

"Since we could throw quarters against a wall, we've been friends and we've been trying to make money together," Goldstock said. "We went to school together, used to cause trouble and have fun together, and now we work together. I'm glad Tom is a friend of mine. It's hard to find a friend you can do business with."

Their newest venture is LT's Grill, a Southern-style grill and barbecue serving food similar to another of the duo's business ventures, Andy's Catering.

Goldstock has owned and managed restaurants in various parts of the country, but coming back to Niskayuna was important to him.

"The whole philosophy here is I'm a kid at heart," Goldstock said. "I love my kids, and as a working single parent, I want a job where my kids can come in whenever they want. When I came up with the concept of this restaurant, I wanted it family-oriented. You always feel comfortable in the place you grew up in, and that's why I wanted to open in Niskayuna."

Coppola agreed.

"It's amazing, moving back here and the amount of support we've gotten from all the people who used to know us," he said.

Coppola and Goldstock both attended Niskayuna High School, and they're proud that their construction crew is local, some members still attending the school. Now that they're hiring their kitchen and waiting staff, they're continuing that tradition.

"When we hire our wait staff, we want them to be very personable, because we want to know our customers. We want them to come back again and again and feel like they're being served by friends," Goldstock said.

Although remodeling the old Blockbuster video store in St. James Square on Balltown Road has been costly, Goldstock said support from their town has made it worthwhile.

Niskayuna Town Planner Kathleen Matern has high hopes for the new restaurant.

"I hope the successes of this restaurant can bring in new businesses to fill up some of the empty shops," she said, referring to St. James Square. "I know the Chinese buffet (the Golden Phoenix) is crowded during the lunch hour with people from (General Electric and Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory), so this will provide another option for their lunch hour."

Upon entering LT's Grill, customers will be seated in a waiting area called "The Corral," a horseshoe-shaped enclosure filled with old church pews, where fresh roasted peanuts and popcorn are served from antique machines.

On one side of the restaurant is the "Pig Pen," an area for families with young children and children's parties, where kids will be given complimentary sheriff's badges and pig snouts. On the other side is "The Stables," the only part of the restaurant that can be reserved for private parties.

Country & Western radio station WGNA (107.7 FM) will be played in the restaurant. (It is a client of Coppola and Goldstock's other business, Andy's Catering). Coppola and Goldstock hope to bring a few of WGNA's clients and stars into the grill someday as well. Coppola and Goldstock have attended several auctions to decorate the restaurant with antique saddles and life-size cowboy figures and cactuses to give the place a true "home on the range" feel.

Everything on the menu is under \$20 with beer and wine under \$5.

"We're based on family, service, price and quality; but family first," Goldstock said. "We want people to wonder how we put out such quality food at such a low cost, and it's because we want people to be able to afford to come here with their family two or three times a week."

LT's Grill is waiting for its liquor license and is still under construction, but hopes are for a soft opening by the first week of February.

The partners plan to give away 300 meals in exchange for brutally honest reviews.

"We decided to do a soft opening because we want everything to be perfect before the grand opening. If you have a terrible grand opening where things go wrong, you weren't prepared for, you can't undo that," Goldstock said.

When asked about the chefs in the kitchen, Coppola laughs.

"There are no chefs - we're cooks. We're not white tablecloth and crystal kind of guys," he said. "If you're looking for a quiet candlelit dinner, you should probably go somewhere else. If you're looking for an affordable, fun night out with your family or a date, this is the place. I'd call us a five horseshoe restaurant."