Downtown filling up on food

Eatery increase feeding on itself

By Dan Daly
Journal Staff Writer

Two new restaurants are slated to open in downtown Rapid City in the next month, continuing a self-perpetuating surge in eating and entertainment businesses that began more than a year ago.

But the partners of the 1915 Firehouse Brewing Co., one of the companies that helped launch the explosion, like having the nearby competition.

"If anything, (more restaurants and clubs) bring more traffic," said Bob Fuchs, the brew pub's general manager. "You can see people walking back and forth."

The Purple Frog, a restaurant owned by Carolyn Wright and Carleen Wittenberg, is set to open soon at 710 St. Joseph St., formerly JR's Bar & Grill.

Wright and Wittenberg are also partners in Something Special, a restaurant-gift shop that opened just up the street two years ago.

And Carini's, an Italian restaurant that opened in May 1990 in Black Hawk, will move downtown sometime around Dec. 17, said owner Keith Brink. Remodeling work is under way at the new location across the street from the Pennington County Courthouse, the former H&O Automotive Building.

"We've kind of outgrown the other place," said Brink. "And 80 percent of our business drives out (to Black Hawk) from Rapid City. We think we can catch them more often (downtown)."

He said the number of other restaurants also helps, but Carini's will be more of a family restaurant. Beer and wine are on the menu, but the restaurant will close at 10 p.m.

Meanwhile on Main Street, the Firehouse Brewing Co. will mark its first anniversary next month at the former Rapid City fire station, 610 Main St. In August of this year, the brew pub was joined by the Uptown Grill directly across the street.

Uptown Grill features a similar menu, along with live entertainment which the Firehouse also has added. The Firehouse partners said they welcomed their new neighbor.

"We were all for it. We even supported (Uptown Grill's) beer and wine license permit. It brings more people downtown, and that's good for everybody," said Mark Polenz, Firehouse Brewing Co. partner.

Fuchs said of the new venues, "I don't think you can ever have too much competition, especially if this is what's going to bring people downtown and combine with the indoor atmosphere of the older buildings, makes it a good place for restaurants," Powell said.

Powell said downtown merchants were pleased with the variety of restaurants in the city's center: hamburgers and pizza to fine dining and entertainment, all within walking distance of each other.

The new mural at Murphy's Bar on Main Street is one of the steps toward a brighter nightlife in downtown Rapid City.

Other, more established businesses also are responding to the trend. Windows on the Dakotas, on the ninth floor of the Metropolitan Bank building, this year introduced live jazz and blues at its bar. Murphy's Bar repainted its front with a brightly lit mural.

And on a given night, music lovers can choose from half a dozen bars, clubs and restaurants that feature live music.

Polenz said the reopening of the Elks Theater and longer hours by some merchants also have brought more people downtown in the evening. And some of the merchants say they are keeping longer hours because restaurants are keeping people downtown longer.