



PHOTOS BY SARAH BREZINSKY GILBERT FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Bartender Richard Watson and longtime Triple D's patron Bill Elbery keep each other company on one of the last days for the Jamaica Plain landmark, closed for a makeover by its new owners.

JAMAICA PLAIN

But can they keep bar funky?

Triple D's new owners take challenge

By Craig Nickels
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

If you press your hand against the tinted front windows and peer in, you can still see the wood-paneled walls with faded squares tracing where picture frames once hung. Photographs of boxers, maps of Ireland, Mary E. Curley Middle School graduating classes, news clippings, even Mayor Curley himself have all been packed or given away.

After months of rumors, Triple D's, the venerable Jamaica Plain bar, changed hands Monday, taking with it almost 30 years of neighborhood memories. But while some worry that its replacement will be an upscale martini bar, it's not a simple case of trading dank for swank.

The new owners, Lyndon Fuller, 38, and Relena Erskine, 32, have lived in JP for 10 years, own a house less than half a mile from Triple D's, and insist their new place, the Alchemist Lounge, will fit in with JP's funky feel.

ing Triple D's during a visit before it closed.

"It's like an old shoe," said Dottie Gavin, Tom's wife.

While longtime regulars appreciated Triple D's familiarity, younger patrons appreciated its authenticity.

"Some places try to look old;

this is the genuine article," said Mark Leonard, 41; he and his wife, Kate Peppard, 30, used to live nearby.

In earlier times, Triple D's was a gathering spot for families.

"Kids used to come in and ask for a Coke and say, 'My mom'll pay you tomorrow,'" said longtime waitress Laura Ofilos.

It also housed a bevy of neighborhood activities and traditions, from Park League baseball post-mortems to the annual St. Patrick's Day celebrations that serve as informal reunions for those who've left the neighborhood.

In recent years, the bar's most popular event was Saturday night

Jamaica Plain would like to see a locally owned, independent business there," she said. "It's great to see young people from the neighborhood come in and continue the business."

The balancing act for Fuller and Erskine will be making the bar their own without alienating the regulars.

"It's a very tricky thing," said Gerry Brennan, who's owned the nearby Brendan Behan Pub for 18 years. "You have to keep it moderately priced, keep the same friendly vibe, the same neighborhood feel."

Fuller and Erskine, who plan to open the Alchemist in late March, know

they have a tough act to follow.

"Triple D's is completely authentic," Fuller said. "The camaraderie, the uniqueness, the friendliness... If we could re-create half of that, we'd be happy."

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GERRY BRENNAN
Longtime owner of
Brendan Behan Pub

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"There's a lot of misconception of what's going in there," Fuller said.

Fuller and Erskine do have some major changes in mind: tearing out the paneling to expose the brick walls, offering live music, serving "New American" cuisine instead of corned beef and burgers.

Fuller trained as a cook and restaurant manager in England and has ties to celebrity chef Todd English. He's a waiter at English's Bonfire restaurant in Boston and previously worked at Figs in Wellesley and Chestnut Hill. Despite the pedigree, he envisions Alchemist as a place for everyone, with Pabst Blue Ribbon and dinner for less than \$20. Fuller and Erskine cite the South End's Franklin Cafe and Cambridge's Central Kitchen and B-Side Lounge as places they'd like to emulate.

In Triple D's, however, Fuller and Erskine have some big shoes to fill. Over the years, the bar at South Huntington Avenue and Moraine Street became a blue-collar beacon in a neighborhood that frets over gentrification. Patrons from boxers to hipsters dropped in to enjoy \$2.50 bottles of Bud, \$3.25 pints of Guinness, and \$8.95 corned beef dinners.

"It's still your neighborhood bar," said 60-year-old Tom Gavin, a retired postal worker, regular patron, sometime bartender, and lifelong JP resident, contemplat-

"Gary-oke," where lesbians and hipsters mingled with gray-haired townies in a uniquely Boston mix.

"It's a special crowd," said Gary Gifford, host of the Saturday sing-alongs. "This has been a very good thing for JP. It's brought people together."

The warmth people feel for Triple D's has made it hard for many to accept the change.

Mickey McFarland, who tended bar at Triple D's for 15 years, said it feels as if the new owners will be ignoring the neighborhood crowd.

"They went to the businessmen," he said. "They didn't go to Johnny on the street."

Dottie Gavin, talking with McFarland and husband Tom in a back corner, said, "Remember 30 years ago how we used to hate it when old people talked about the good old days? Now we're those people."

Former co-owners Joe Devlin, a retired boxer and correctional officer, and Tom DeCourcy, an attorney, are both 73. Devlin said they were both ready to retire from the bar business. The third "D," Joe's brother Sonny, died about 10 years ago.

"All neighborhoods go through changes," said Kathie Mainzer, who co-owns and manages nearby Bella Luna and Milky Way Lanes. She knows Fuller and Erskine; Fuller used to tend bar at Milky Way.

"Everybody who cares about



After three decades as a neighborhood bar, Triple D's is in line for a new decor and menu but on a low-key scale, owners say.