New South Side restaurant is inspired by international street food

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By Dan Gigler / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The conventional wisdom in recent years for aspiring restaurateurs long on ambition but short on funds has been to start with a food truck, build a brand and a business, and then graduate to a full-service, bricks-and-mortar space.

Matt and Lauren Christie took the opposite route — they wanted a food truck but ended up with a restaurant: Streets on Carson, which specializes in international street fare and opened last week on the South Side.

“I’m fascinated by street culture and street food,” Mr. Christie explained. “You go to a market or bazaar anywhere in the world, and there’s always one food item that is most common. And that was our approach — what is that one thing? We started doing the research and finding out what that thing was in, say, Rio de Janeiro or Mexico City.”

“Our first idea was a food truck — it’s the cheapest, easiest way to get your own business,” he said, but that idea evolved. “Instead of having one food truck with one thing, why not have 20 street food trucks in one business? We wrote about five menus’ worth of stuff, but these were our favorites.”

That includes: Mexican huaraches, French lobster crepes, Brazilian bolinhos, Sicilian arancini, Peruvian chicharrones, Dutch stroopwafels and, representing the United States, a filet mignon hamburger, of course. Gourmet chocolates from nearby Le Petit Chocolat are on the dessert menu.

The energetic Beaver Falls native with a spot-on forearm tattoo of deceased rapper Ol’ Dirty Bastard is a 2002 graduate of the now-closed Pennsylvania Culinary Institute. He spent five years working in Philadelphia, which included a stint as the personal private chef to Philadelphia Eagles owner Jeffrey Lurie. He returned to Pittsburgh five years ago and met his wife, a Bethlehem native who attended Duquesne University. They worked together at the now-defunct Bridge Ten Brasserie on the South Side.
But it was over beers at another spot last spring that their plans came together.

“We were sitting in the window at Jack’s directly across the street, and we watched them put a for sale sign up,” on the building that once housed gourmet taqueria Yo Rita. “Everything came together from there.”

Street art, via a bright graffiti mural by local artist Jewels Antonio, and additional pieces featuring the skylines of Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Paris and Istanbul by Dante Lombardi give the place a colorful aesthetic. The logo borrows from Pittsburgh’s iconic blue street signs.

Just less than a mile away in another city neighborhood south of the Monongahela, the methodical revitalization of the Warrington Avenue corridor in Allentown continues with the opening of Breakfast at Shelly’s, a diner, which, as the name indicates, specializes in daily breakfast (and lunch) by Shelly Moeller of Carrick.

Ms. Moeller and partner Sean Coley take over the space that was Michelle’s Diner, a neighborhood institution for nearly 40 years before it closed last year.

“Everything is made to order. Nothing is precooked. We want to be on a first-name basis with our customers and have a fun, homey feeling, like you’re eating at your mom’s house,” Ms. Moeller said.

That’s fitting as she learned under her own mother, Cheryl O’Leary, who runs the longtime O’Leary’s Diner on the South Side. However, the staff’s T-shirts do tease, “This ain’t ya mama’s kitchen — get to tippin” while a sign on the door cracks, “Eat here — or we’ll both starve!”

A grand opening celebration for Breakfast at Shelly’s will take place on Saturday.

Finally, Downtown Pittsburgh welcomes the inaugural local outpost for Cincinnati-based Bakersfield. Specializing in another favorite street food — tacos — and tequila, Bakersfield’s sixth location in five states is on the 900 block of Penn Avenue and will be open Monday through Saturday for happy hour and dinner. The original location was featured on a 2014 episode of the Food Network program “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives.”

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