

500 WEST FLORIDA STREET
MILWAUKEE, WI 53204

THEIRONHORSEHOTEL.COM
1.888.543.IRON (4766)



THE IRON HORSE
HOTEL™

MEDIA CONTACT
BRIGETTE BREITENBACH

BRIGETTE@COMPANYBONLINE.COM
1.414.750.7298

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TIM DIXON'S BUSINESS SENSE

DEVELOPER BUCKS ECONOMIC TREND BY OPENING IRON HORSE HOTEL, STACK'D BURGER BAR

AUGUST 19, 2009

BY SARAH BIONDICH

Developer Tim Dixon is gaining notoriety for his success in transforming stagnant parcels of land and antiquated buildings around the state into viable properties capable of supporting homes and businesses. Bucking an economic trend that finds more restaurants and bars closing than opening, Dixon premiered the Iron Horse Hotel less than a year ago and will be hosting a grand opening party Saturday, Aug. 22, for his newest venture, Stack'd Burger Bar in Walker's Point.

How did your involvement in the restaurant industry begin?

I built and ran a restaurant called Timothy's in West Bend, Wisconsin, when I was 21 years old. After three years, I had lost everything because I didn't know what I was doing. One thing I did learn was that I am not an operator; I just love building. So after college, I went back to carpentry and started acquiring sites.

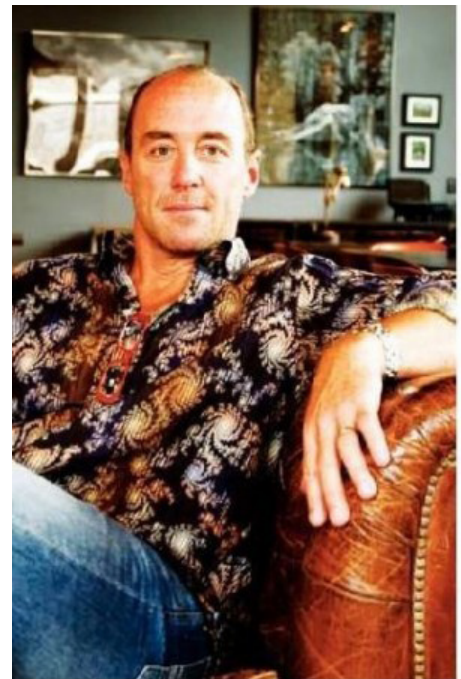
Didn't you want some time to breathe between launching a brand new boutique hotel and opening a new restaurant?

I own every building on the block, including the Kramer Foundry. One of the tenants could no longer make a go of it. In these times, I couldn't find a restaurateur that was willing to pay rent. So by default, I decided to open my own place. I called my friend Joe Bartolotta and asked him what he would do with it. He said nothing's making money but burgers, so I created a cool bar that serves really good burgers. Now, admittedly, I don't run it. I just found the right people.

By people, you mean chef Bruce Evans?

Bruce came in as a consultant and helped us set up and get organized. He built the team, including a young, talented chef for the kitchen named Cory Reifschneider.

Do the menus have your mark at all?



Tim Dixon | Photo by Amelia Coffaro

I cook, so my sons and I played around making huge stacked burgers at home, and those can be found on the menu at the burger bar. For Branded [the Iron Horse Hotel bar], I wanted to take a Wisconsin tavern menu and make it better. Tom [head chef Thomas Schultz] just nailed it. Same thing with Smyth. I said, "If you have to describe anything with a 'drizzle,' it's not what I want." This is a Wisconsin restaurant: I want Wisconsin cheese and Wisconsin meat. I want a breadboard with real bread on it. I want venison, not veal. I want bluegill. Tom just ran with it. Man, that kid can cook!

Do you see another restaurant in your immediate future?

We can't find another tenant for the space next door, so we're going to do another concept, soon to be announced. That one's going to be fun. It's going to be very interesting.

Where did you develop your business sense?

I have failed as much as I've succeeded in my career. It's survivability. I keep telling my staff, "If we can survive today, our chances of surviving the next day are even better."

Stack'd Burger Bar: 170 S. First St./ Milwaukee/ 414-273-7800/ www.stackedbar.com

The Iron Horse Hotel: 500 W. Florida St./ Milwaukee/ 888-543-4766/ www.theironhorsehotel.com

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