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Part of Pickler's now unveiled

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Pickler's Famous will bring the sweet taste of nostalgia to Kirksville residents of all ages, just a little later than anticipated.

Todd Kuhns, Pickler's Famous owner, revealed via e-mail Monday evening that an ice cream parlor and soda fountain will comprise part of the business, but he said four more aspects of the business are yet to come, each, in his opinion, more exciting than the last. Kuhns had hoped to open Dec. 1, but complications with construction and renovations have pushed the opening date back, he said. The business, under construction since June, hopefully will open its doors to the public early in 2009, Kuhns said.

"As in any case when you're remodeling a building this old, once you get in there and start tearing things apart in order to do construction, you'll find unforeseen things that you weren't planning on having to deal with," Kuhns said.

When workers removed a plaster ceiling on the second floor, they discovered the building's roof was not properly supported, Kuhns said. Removal of an elevator in the 1930s left a small section of the ceiling slowly sagging in, he said.

"Normally with a modern building, and even many buildings built at that time, you would see truss work that's kind of triangular and supported," he said. "This was some boards that were nailed vertically, and not even that many, and not even that strongly."

In addition, the building needed some reinforcement work to the floor between the first and second stories, he said. Kuhns said this labor was time-consuming and also required specifications from a structural engineer, but that the work has been interesting.

"That building really hasn't had any major structural remodeling like we have done to it since it was built," Kuhns said. "It's pretty exciting, because what we're looking at, when we look at the timbers and things in that building, is lumber that's almost 120 years old."

Kuhns has a long-time interest in the turn of the century time period, a time when technology began to show great progress, he said. Soda fountains also became popular at about this time, he said, and he hopes

to bring some of the concepts from that time period into the store.

"At the time that soda fountains started becoming popular, the technology [to bottle soda] was fairly rare," he said. "It did exist, but it was sort of hard to find bottles that could hold up under the carbonation process that they were using."

In a society where consumers are used to chain restaurants and fast food with standardized recipes and the same menu in every city, the ice cream parlor and soda fountain in Pickler's Famous will be a unique place where customers can have their treats made just to taste, he said.

"We're bringing back a lot of things ... that people haven't seen in a long time," Kuhns said. "Old recipes, handmade syrups and hand-mixed sodas right in front of you, That's the way it used to be."

Kuhns won't reveal what else Pickler's Famous will contain, but said he plans to continue releasing clues through his e-mail group, the Inner Circle. He said the building contains 10,000 square feet, which is a lot of space to fill. Once he has a better idea of the final opening date, he will plan out how to release the rest of the clues, Kuhns said.

"I think once you see it all, all five pieces, you'll see kind of a bigger vision," he said. "It's not just five separate things shoved under one roof, but kind of a cohesive whole that we think is going to be good for the community and be good for the downtown, is going to provide something for people of all ages and interest levels."

Ken Shook, architect and owner of K. A. Shook Design, has been working on Pickler's Famous since June. Shook said keeping the project a secret hasn't been hard because he has only lived in Kirksville for about a year and doesn't know too many people yet. He said he had to sign a non-disclosure agreement about the details of the project.

Working with older buildings like Pickler's Famous has certain challenges, such as the unexpected structural problems that set work back, Shook said.

"Older buildings are not square," he said. "They seem to all have settled over time. All walls are not coming to a right angle. All the walls going up are kind of wavy. Structurally we try to bring it back [into shape], but we try to work with the building."

Seeing the project come together has been the best part of the experience, Shook said.

Kuhns said the turn of the century was something of a Golden Age, and although he didn't live in those times, he thinks it was a great period.

"I think a lot of older folks who remember the days of the soda fountains are going to revisit some of that nostalgia, and then those of us who are not old enough to remember that are going to be enjoying it for the first time as a brand new and fun experience," Kuhns said.

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