

New riverfront restaurant on an island surrounded by ocean of big plans



Interurban Boathouse's location may be remembered by some for the old Joe's Fisheries and smokehouse that used to occupy the site. *Photo Yelp*

BY PATRICK BUTLER

Edgewater's Christine McCabe must have always figured she'd be rolling in a lot of dough.

After majoring in business management she gravitated toward accounting but soon got bored. So at her mother's urging, McCabe went through Westbourne trade school's culinary program, worked three years at Charlie Trotter's old landmark restaurant on Armitage Ave., then opened a pastry shop just behind Trotter's where she made a lot of bread.

Despite her solid experience at Trotter's, "there were lots of surprises. It was more difficult than I thought it would be. For one thing, it was hard to find good staff."

But at least now I know what to look for," said McCabe, who now looks more for attitude than skill.

"If you're willing to learn and can be taught, we can work with you," said McCabe, who just opened her newest place – the Interurban Boathouse, 1438 W. Cortland, deep in the heart of the soon-to-be booming North Riverfront on the border of Bucktown and Lincoln Park.

If you visit her waterfront restaurant today it looks a lot more Berlin after WWII than the hottest real estate north of the Loop. Everything around her has been lev-

eled by various developers who are licking their chops at the piles of 'dough' they plan to make by re-visioning the suddenly popular riverfront.

It's as if she now operates on an island surrounded by an ocean of dreams and billion dollar development plans. The steel mills and scrap yards are now gone but the emptiness won't last long. Real estate wise, this area is hotter than the old Finkl blast furnaces were that used to sit on the east bank of the river.

Her location may be remembered by some for the old Joe's Fisheries and smokehouse that used to occupy the site. Indeed the wood fires of the now shuttered smokehouses linger and takes one back to the day 72 years ago when at LTS (formerly Schweig Fish Co.), was the last commercial fishing operation still working out of Chicago at this location.

Prior to World War II there were some 28 commercial fishing outfits working the lake from Waukegan to south Chicago.

The old smokehouse and docks are still there, but the view today has changed, and will continue to change in the next couple years. Like post war Berlin, the flat empty spaces will soon bloom billions of dollars in new development, maybe even a new Amazon headquarters.

When that all happens diners can count



Chris McCabe serves customers at her just-opened Interurban Boathouse, 1438 W. Cortland. Open little more than a month, she's already been followed by some of her old customers from the Halsted/Armitage area. *Photo by Ronald Roenigk*

on McCabe's riverfront patio being a tough seat to get.

"I kind of describe this as an all-day contemporary American café. Just a mix of all kinds of foods people are familiar with. Along with a few surprise elements like Japanese vegetable pancakes," said McCabe.

No, she didn't invent them. There is such a thing, said McCabe, who said she's probably proudest of her pot pie and fish and chips.

"But the goat cheese is a best seller, along with the Cubano sandwiches and buckwheat crepe," she said.

Although she's starting to see a lot of people from her old place in Lincoln Park, McCabe said she's starting to see even more workers from some of the places around Goose Island and the North Branch coming in to try the place out.

She's already making plans to add more workers to the 25 employees ranging from busboys to chefs.

So why did she put down stakes in a neighborhood even the cops once avoided if they could?

"Well, I've always been pretty much of a risk-taker and I enjoy a challenge. And I could foresee what's going on around here."

"And the rent was good and the long-term lease was too good to pass up," McCabe said.

Asked if it's better for someone starting out to have a partner or sink or swim on their own, she said "I think it's best if you can go out on your own, but if you do need a partner, look for someone with different skill sets than your own."

And what advice would she have for some 22-year-old looking to follow her steps in the restaurant business?

"Be sure you're willing to give up your social life and not get paid a lot for awhile," she laughed.

"It has to be a labor of love," said McCabe, who's betting everything on smooth sailing for her new Interurban Boathouse.

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