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CENTERPIECE

## Developer unveils Falstaff venue in Galveston, new Texas City eatery serves up Honduran cuisine

Oct 12, 2019



Jerome Karam stands beside one of the tables at his new venture, Events @ The Tasting Room, in the former F building in Galveston on Thursday, Oct. 10, 2019. The brewery was built in 1905 and was a significant employer  
KELSEY WALLING/The Daily News

**Room with a view:** After two years renovating what would be his most challenging development yet, **Jerome Karam** has unveiled **Events @ The Tasting Room** in the original tasting room of the **Falstaff Brewery** building in Galveston.

“This project was by far my biggest undertaking,” said Karam, a Friendswood attorney and developer. “I’m incredibly grateful for my team of architects, subcontractors and executives.”

The team experienced delays and cost over-runs largely tied with preserving the historic integrity of the building, Karam said.

“But after 39 years of dormancy, I couldn’t be more proud to restore history and bring back the tasting room,” Karam said.

Karam last week showed off the elegant venue and also the many Falstaff mementos residents donated to its décor, making it one of the most emotional ventures he’s pursued, he said.

Everyone in Galveston has a “Falstaff Memory,” Karam said.

“I can’t emphasize how proud I am to be the developer and owner of such an iconic building,” Karam said. “People have stopped me everywhere I go to tell me some of their relatives worked for Falstaff and what the place meant to them. This building evokes emotion when people talk about it.”

Once a sizable employer, Falstaff Brewery, 3301 Church St., closed in 1981.

At least four developers have attempted to resurrect the old building, which was built in 1905 and changed hands several times before Falstaff closed. So, when Karam acquired the building in 2015, there were skeptics. The **Galveston Historical Foundation** considered the building significant. Some neighbors considered it an eyesore, however, and have advocated its demolition.

City officials had long hoped redevelopment of the 330,000-square-foot building would spur renewal north of Broadway.

Events @ The Tasting Room features two large dining halls with authentic and original tile, a conference room with an 82-inch smart TV, bridal room, and a rooftop patio with nearly 360-degree views of downtown Galveston and the Gulf of Mexico.

Karam sought state and federal historic tax credits, which come with strict guidelines and requirements to adhere to the authenticity of the building, which contributed to some of the challenges and expenses, he said.

For example, when it was time to install the terrazzo tile at the venue, Karam and crew, to meet historic requirements, had to find the exact color of the original flooring, he said. No one made that particular color anymore, requiring a custom order. Karam describes the color as “a very expensive green.” There were many other challenges and requirements, but his team didn’t stop, he said.

**David Watson** was the architect and **Pinnacle Construction** was the contractor. **Ashley Cole** is vice president of **JMK5 Holdings**, which is the development firm over Karam’s many projects.

Along with the event venue, Karam has developed cruise-ship terminal parking and climate-controlled storage with plans for a boutique hotel at the site. He expects to hotel to be complete by the fall of 2021.

“We are full steam ahead,” Karam said.

**Hot dish:** A new restaurant is adding some new flavors to Texas City’s dining scene. **Rosa Rios** has opened **Rios Kitchen Mexican & Katracho Cuisine**. Katracho, or catracho, is a way of identifying someone of Honduran heritage. The eatery, which opened last week at 6902 FM 1765, prepares foods from scratch and offers such specialities as pollo con tajadas,

a typical Honduran dish of fried chicken with fried plantain slices and cabbage served with a sauce. That dish always wins over people who have never tried Honduran cuisine, Rios said.

Honduran cuisine is a fusion of indigenous Spanish, Caribbean and African cuisines.

She hopes more people will try the eatery, which also serves Mexican food with a Veracruz influence.

The **Texas City-La Marque Chamber of Commerce** on Oct. 4 held a ribbon-cutting for Rios Kitchen.

**Bank notes:** As some banks retreat from brick-and-mortar sites, some continue to open new branches in the county. Most recently, **Frost** opened what it calls its **Clear Creek Financial Center** at 201 FM 270 in League City. It's the first-ever Frost location in the growing city and designed to generate more customer interaction, an industry trend meant to counter the effects of more people banking online without ever walking into a branch.

The Clear Creek Financial Center marks the seventh such center for the Houston region since Frost announced an expansion plan in 2018, and it's the third new center Frost has opened in Houston in the past three weeks.

Consumer visits to retail bank branches are expected to drop 36 percent between 2017 and 2022, with mobile transactions rising 121 percent in the same period, as customers increasingly shift to accessing their banking information via apps and sites on their mobile devices, according to industry tracker The Financial Brand.

Frost's new Clear Creek Financial Center features a range of services for consumer and business customers, including commercial and personal bankers and investment services, officials said.

The Clear Creek Financial Center also offers one of Frost’s newer design features, a welcoming greeter station, where bankers can assist customers with transactions, opening accounts or applying for loans and by answering questions.

A 151-year old bank, based in San Antonio, Frost operates more than 130 financial centers across Texas, including 39 in the Houston region. It plans to open 18 more financial centers in the Houston region by the end of 2020, officials said.

**Nationwide:** Two local restaurants got some national attention, generating buzz and pride around the county. **Shrimp N’ Stuff** in Galveston and **Stingaree** in Crystal Beach made Southern Living’s prestigious list of The South’s Best Seafood Shack in the magazine’s October issue. Shrimp N’ Stuff’s 3901 Ave. O restaurant made the magazine. Shrimp N Stuff also has a downtown restaurant. Stingaree, 1295 N Stingaree Drive on Bolivar Peninsula, got a shout out for crunchy, soft-shell crabs, tender snapper, perfectly fried, stuffed or boiled shrimp and “delectable Texas Blue Crab Cakes.”

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## (2) comments

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**V W Uher**

Oct 14, 2019 6:26pm

The work on the old Falstaff Brewery is impressive. I've followed this since the first idea for redevelopment was mentioned several years ago. I'm glad to see someone with great vision take on such a demanding project. Well done!



**Bailey Jones**

Oct 14, 2019 7:13pm

We drive past the brewery after Sunday lunch at Soul 2 Soul. That whole area is primed for great things  
- I hope they happen!