

Original Gino's East returns to original site

BY JANET RAUSA FULLER

Staff Reporter

The Original Gino's East is going back home.

And while its digs are technically new, the vibe is meant to feel just like the old days.

The pizzeria, known for its deep-dish pizza and letting diners scribble on the restaurant's tables and walls, is re-opening Friday on Superior Street just east of Michigan Avenue, where it all began 40 years ago.

In 2000, the eatery at 160 E. Superior moved to River North — taking along ovens and graffiti-covered walls. The old site — three townhomes cobbled together, according to Stan Brashears of Phillips Martin Real Estate, the site's developer — was torn down. Berwyn-based Buona Beef moved in, opening Joey Buona's Pizzeria Grille.

Graffiti not going to Superior

Joey Buona's closed earlier this year, but the companies now have

partnered to bring the Chicago pizza icon back to Superior. The Gino's East at 633 N. Wells will stay open.

The original graffitied walls are staying at the Wells location, but the Superior site has new wall panels for eager scribes, said Jeffrey Himmel, president of Bravo Restaurants, which owns Gino's East.

The new "old" location, which Buona and Gino's East are leasing from Superior 160 LLC, will have rooftop seating and will offer Buona's Italian beef sandwiches.

"It's a great thing we're partners with another Chicago institution [with] true Chicago products — deep-dish pizza and Italian beef," said Joe Buonavolanto Jr., co-owner of the Buona Companies.

WHO'S GINO?

It isn't exactly clear, but the name apparently had a ring to it that cabdrivers Sam Levine and Fred Bartoli liked when naming their pizzeria at 160 E. Superior.

Levine, Bartoli and their friend, George Loverde, opened the Original Gino's East in 1966.

They likely tacked on the "East" to distinguish themselves from another Gino's pizzeria on Rush Street, said Sun-Times restaurant critic and cookbook author Pat Bruno.

Gino's East wasn't the birthplace of deep-dish pizza — that distinction belongs to Pizzeria Uno — but its trademark crust was developed by a former Uno's cook.

Over the years, the restaurant also became known for encouraging its customers to etch their names into the wood tables and paneled walls.

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