Greetings,

The winter months are a great time to explore local restaurants that offer cozy atmospheres and a respite from the gloomy, chilly days. The choices are abundant throughout the county, with several new additions and old favorites. This month’s e-news focuses on the restaurant industry, its impact on the economy, and some strategies that will benefit both diners and restaurateurs.

To learn more about the resources mentioned in this newsletter or to become involved in EDAB activities, please visit the Harford County Office of Economic Development website at www.harfordbusiness.org/.

Sincerely,

Eric McLauchlin
Chairman, EDAB

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT:

Pairings Bistro

One of Harford County’s newer upscale restaurants is Pairings Bistro on Laurel Bush Road in Bel Air. Designed to pair appropriate wines with original Mediterranean, Belgian and Chesapeake Bay dishes, Pairings is the brainchild of local chef and owner Jon Kohler.

Since opening the bistro in 2009, he has gained a following of both wine connoisseurs and what he calls “food groupies” that has made the restaurant and its adjoining wine shop a success. The menu changes regularly to reflect the seasons and the use of fresh, local ingredients. Guests can enjoy over 50 selections of wine by the glass in three-ounce tastes, half glasses or full glasses, or they can choose from more than 150 varieties of wine by the bottle, all available in the wine shop.

Pairings hosts monthly wine classes that include six wine samples highlighting a particular region, a regional food pairing and a discussion with a wine expert. In addition, wine dinners featuring a prix fixe menu and a selection of wines to complement each course are available each month. For holidays from Mother’s Day to Valentine’s Day, Pairings offers special celebrations such as champagne brunch or couples dining. Event catering is also available.

IN THIS ISSUE

Business Spotlight
Plentiful Plate of Restaurants
Restaurant Facts

HARFORD COUNTY SERVES UP

PLENTIFUL PLATE OF RESTAURANTS

Have you noticed an expanded menu of restaurant selections across the County? There seems to be a wider choice of upscale eateries. It’s obvious that both independent and chain restaurants are striving to sustain business and new restaurants are showing confidence in the County’s potential growth.

Nationally, the restaurant industry is predicting slight growth in 2010, generating $580 billion in sales—a 2.5 percent increase over 2009, according the recently released 2010 Restaurant Industry Forecast from the National Restaurant Association. Maryland generated $9 billion in restaurant sales last year and is named among the top 10 growth states for sales in 2010, at 2.6 percent increase. Harford County, though trending flat to slightly down through October, showed a $2 million increase in 2008 with $276 million in restaurant sales, as tracked by the Restaurant Association of Maryland.

According to the National Restaurant Association’s surveys, despite being forced to cut back spending in a down economy, consumers still say dining out is a priority. These consumers are seeking value, convenience and expanded menu options. They are also looking for locally sourced food, healthy and nutritious options and a variety of ethnic cuisines. The forecast cites important amenities to be successful such as delivery, interactive guest activities and social media communication.

Local restaurateurs are well aware. They are offering expanded menus, creating upscale yet value-based cuisine using fresh, local ingredients. Asian, Belgian, French and Mexican fare have joined the mainstay continental and Italian sites, giving residents a wider variety of food choices.

Restaurant owners are investing in Harford County. For example, Chop Stix, a new Asian-fusion restaurant opened in Forest Hill in 2009, as well as Pairings Bistro in Bel Air and The Vineyard Wine Bar in Havre de Grace, among others. City-based restaurants like Liberatore’s and Green Turtle are finding that suburban Bel Air and Aberdeen hold great opportunities.

Restaurants are one of the nation’s largest private-sector employers, representing more than nine percent of the nation’s job base. In
Mark Your Calendar for Restaurant Week:
June 10–17, 2010

RESTAURANT FACTS

- Nationwide restaurant sales are projected to reach a record high in 2010, with expected sales of $580 billion.
- Every dollar spent by consumers in restaurants generates an additional $2.05 spent in the nation's economy.
- Ninety-one percent of eating-and-drinking places have fewer than 50 employees.
- The National Restaurant Association forecasts a gradually improving environment in 2010 for restaurants, with the stronger gains coming in the second half of the year.
- Despite losing jobs in 2009, the restaurant industry outperformed the economy with a 0.9 percent job loss rate in eating-and-drinking places vs. 3.7 percent for the overall economy. The National Restaurant Association projects job growth will resume in 2010, with an expected employment of about 12.7 million people this year.
- Restaurants are heeding conservation messages. Four of 10 fullservice and 31 percent of quickservice operators plan to devote more resources to green initiatives in 2010 than they did the previous year.
- Top food trends for 2010*: Locally grown produce, locally sourced meats and seafood, sustainability, bite-size/mini desserts, locally produced wine and beer, nutritionally balanced children's dishes, half-portions, farm/estate-branded ingredients, gluten-free/food-allergy conscious, sustainable seafood.

*Results from the National Restaurant Association's 2009 survey of over 1800 professional chefs from the American Culinary Federation

Source: National Restaurant Association 2010 Restaurant Industry Forecast
Restaurant Association of Maryland

The Economic Development Advisory Board consists of a number of subcommittees -- including technology, workforce development, finance, tourism and land use -- dedicated to the positive growth and economic development of Harford County.