

Thursday, June 18, 2009

Music, food to be signature items at saloon

by Kenneth Lassiter

David Samuelson and Eddie Miller of Oskaloosa dreamt of running their own bar, and those dreams have come true, almost just like they wanted, at The Grainery Saloon at Apple Valley Farm in rural Ozarkie.



The duo formally opened shop with a private grand opening party May 16 and the party ended up being a trial by fire. The invite-only party ended up bringing 400 to the bar and grill, which sits just off 86th Street, which turns into Hamilton Road past the entrance to Lakewood Hills west of Ferguson Road.

"Four hundred of our 'closest friends' showed up and we brought in the David B Band and packed this place," Samuelson said. Both he and Miller are natives of central Illinois and Samuelson is a registered nurse at the University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City. "We learned a lot of lessons, but it was good. It's good to find out how you handle that situation early on."

Samuelson has some experience in running a commercial kitchen while Miller has tended bar in the past and also developed some connections through work the last couple years at Westside Liquor in Oskaloosa. They had been waiting for an opportunity to operate their own bar when, last year, they heard rumors the Grainery would be in need of new owners. After some discussion, they decided in January to give it a go.

"Ever since we moved out here (in 1998) we had been keeping our eyes open," Samuelson said. "There were rumors this would be available."

"We decided to go for it," Miller added. "This is our chance to do something in Jefferson County."

They lease the Grainery building from Apple Valley Farm owner Jeff Blodig. They plan to have the bar open 11 months a year and the hours are 4 p.m. to 2 a.m. Thursday, Friday and Monday, Saturday noon to 2 a.m. and Sunday 10 a.m. to 2 a.m. The bar will close for December but will still be available for rent for seasonal parties, as it is year-round.

Samuelson and Miller have made sure the new version of the Grainery is unique. The Sunday early open hours are to allow for a brunch buffet, and the menu features Miller's buffalo chicken dip, sweet potato fries, sour cream and chives fries, fried green beans with wasabi and other uncommon offerings. A Monday steak night featuring a 12-ounce KC Strip steak with sides and a special marinade each week for \$11 has been a hit. The regular price of \$12 every other night makes it the most expensive item on the menu at the Grainery.

"We wanted to step it up," Miller said. Terry "Tank" Gift of McLouth is the cook for the bar and grill and the duo have more than 10 employees in tow. "We want it to be the same place it's been, but with a little bit extra. The fried green beans have been a huge hit as an appetizer."

The fries have also been a hit in the saloon's early weeks.

"We wanted to make it so people think 'I gotta go to the Grainery to get those fries,' " Samuelson said. The bar also offers "Country Fried Fridays" dinner specials, and a 75-cent taco night on Thursdays.

At the same time, the bar is still the bar as the Grainery offers a full selection of mixed drinks. Special events are set to be planned on Sundays for NASCAR fans to come out and watch the weekly race on the bar's big screen TV. Other events will be planned when the seasons change and other sports step into the spotlight.

Live music is also a keystone of the bar on weekends as Miller and Samuelson plan live music on Saturdays, and on Friday, July 3. They want to switch up the style from country and honkytonk to rock and blues from week to week to cater to all listening tastes. Miller and Samuelson also hope to start offering DJ and karaoke nights on Fridays soon.

The bar also caters somewhat to the motorcycle-riding crowd as bike riders can get a discount on Saturdays from noon to 4 p.m. if they're willing to have their picture taken with their bike for the saloon wall and website. Miller and Samuelson were hoping to bring in some business from an upcoming Harley Owners Group rally in Lawrence and hope to capitalize on the large draw of the ABATE festival each Labor Day weekend.

All in all, it's been a good start for Miller and Samuelson at The Grainery Saloon. The invite-only grand opening crush was eclipsed by an even bigger crowd the next weekend. Samuelson said despite the heavy business he wants to make sure the kitchen is always ready for more.

"We want it to be complete and full-service," he said. "We want families to be able to come out for steak nights and country fried nights. We offer our complete menu until midnight, but all the appetizers are available until 2 a.m. We'll keep

extras on hand so we don't run out, especially on Monday steak nights."

Miller and Samuelson have been pleased with the turnout as they've had patrons from Lawrence, Kansas City, Leavenworth and Topeka as well as various areas of the county thus far.

"It's not just a lake crowd," Samuelson said.

Friends are a big part of what has made The Grainery Saloon what it is for Miller and Samuelson. The special nights were geared not to conflict with similar offerings at Sandy's Bar and Grill in Oskaloosa. Miller and Samuelson hand-picked the staff with the idea that each is an important part of the new venture.

"This is more of a passion for us than a money maker," said Miller of the saloon. "We want it to have something for everyone. We tell everybody that works for us, they're an asset to this place. They're just as much a part of this as we are. It's a real family and team, and it's great that way."