

# Eatery’s owner has appreciation for history

Zynda’s will honor past, build toward future

**Rachel Greco**  
Lansing State Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK – MICHIGAN

WILLIAMSTON – More than a century ago the two-story building at 150 E. Grand River Ave. was a blacksmith and harness shop and livery station. By the 1920s vehicles were repaired there, and more than one car dealership did business at the property, including “Jabs” Plymouth in the 1930s and George Johnson Plymouth-Chrysler in the 1950s. Red Cedar Grill put the building on the map for the last 25 years as one of Williamston’s mainstay restaurants. The business closed this month.

The property’s history matters to new owner, Adam Zynda. He’ll reopen it later this year as Zynda’s, his first brick and mortar restaurant, and hopes to hang photos of the building’s past on its walls, a nod to the last 130 years. Zynda has spent the last five years building a following for his East Lansing-based food truck, Zynda BBQ and Smoke Shack. Now he’s writing the historical building’s next chapter, as a restaurant that offers a fusion of barbecue and Southwestern flavors, along with “a little bit of everything.” “It’s been a long time coming,” Zynda, 34, said.

From food truck to restaurant

On Monday morning, less than a week after the building’s former owners, Mike and Amanda Luther, closed Red Cedar Grill’s doors to customers for the last time, Zynda took a window seat inside the 5,200-square-foot restaurant and shared plans for its future. He grew up in Okemos but moved to Williamston four years ago. He’s been making a living in food for eight years, but it’s been with him since childhood. His parents loved to cook, and so does he. Food brought their family together, sister Nikki Zynda said. She’ll oversee



New owner of the former Red Cedar Grill, Adam Zynda, leans on the bar at the restaurant with sister, Nikki Zynda. He plans to open a new restaurant, Zynda’s, there this year. MATTHEW DAE SMITH/LANSING STATE JOURNAL



Red Cedar Grill operated at the location for 25 years. GREG DERUITER/LANSING STATE JOURNAL FILE

marketing for the new restaurant. “We cooked together,” she said. “Food means family. That’s what it represents to us.” “At the end of the day, food was always what I had on my mind,” Adam Zynda said. He opened his food truck in 2015, after working at Louie Louie’s, a barbecue business that operated out of the back of a gas station in Gaylord. It taught him the ins and out of good barbecue, Zynda said, and proved that cooking it was one way to bring people together. “I like the process,” he said. “I think

it’s fun. It’s just an easy way to socialize. People can smell it cooking and it attracts them.” Zynda BBQ and Smoke Shack got its start from a spot off Oakland Avenue in Lansing, but quickly settled in at a lot next to Tom’s Party Store and Wine Shop off East Grand River Avenue in East Lansing. The food truck won’t close when Zynda’s opens. The seasonal operation serves up pulled pork, brisket, ribs and smoked chicken salad from May to late November. More than half of its business comes from catering.

Zynda has been looking for the right location to open a restaurant for more than a year, and he’d hoped to find one in Williamston. The city’s downtown offers unique shops and eateries, the makings of a destination community, he said. “I love Williamston,” he said. “I think there’s an intimate feel here.” Zynda began considering the former Red Cedar Grill building just a few months ago, closing on the property last week. He declined to give the purchase price but said he’ll spend “hundreds of thousands” of dollars to renovate it before opening Zynda’s.

Renovations and plans

Renovations at the restaurant are expected to start soon. Preliminary plans include some exterior changes to the entrance, allowing for signage that will face traffic traveling down East Grand River Avenue. Plans also call for the addition of a glass garage door at the front of the building and the creation of an outdoor patio with seating for 10 to 15 people. Zynda said he hopes to add windows to the building, allowing for more natural light inside the dining room. The location of the restaurant’s bar will be moved and updated, and the interior of the restaurant will get new flooring and seating, he said. A banquet room will get updates as well. Work at the building is expected to take four to five months, Zynda said. When it opens Zynda’s will employ between 20 and 25 people, he said, and staff will include former Red Cedar Grill employees. “I hope they all stay,” he said. Customers will find a lot has changed at the restaurant when Zynda’s opens but Red Cedar Grill’s beloved carrot cake might be on the dessert menu. Zynda has high hopes for the new restaurant’s future. “There’s really no reason we wouldn’t do well but it’s going to be a lot of work,” he said. “I plan on being an active owner.”

Contact Rachel Greco at [rgreco@lsj.com](mailto:rgreco@lsj.com). Follow her on Twitter @GrecoatLSJ.

TIME TO **RAISE** THE CURTAIN

AMERICA’S BAND

12 SIDES OF SUMMER  
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28

LARRY THE CABLE GUY  
REMAIN SEATED  
FRIDAY, MARCH 13

JAKE OWEN  
FRIDAY, MARCH 27

Dick Fox’s  
GOLDEN BOYS  
Starring  
FRANKIE AVALON • FABIAN • BOBBY RYDELL  
FRIDAY, APRIL 3

Tickets available now at the FireKeepers  
Box Office or [FireKeepersCasino.com](http://FireKeepersCasino.com).

TIME TO GET YOUR **VEGAS** ON™

FIREKEEPERS  
CASINO • HOTEL  
BATTLE CREEK

Must be 21 or older. Tickets based on availability. Schedule subject to change.

February 14th is

Valentine’s Day

Tell that special someone how much they mean to you  
with a special announcement on February 14th.

Cost is only **\$15.00**

Deadline for placing your ad  
in this special section is  
**Friday, February 7th, 2020**

Email your short message, photo and  
contact information to  
**[lsj-classified@lsj.com](mailto:lsj-classified@lsj.com)**  
or call  
**888-508-9353 ext. 5501**  
for assistance

Happy  
Valentine’s  
Day, Sam!  
*Love,*  
Mary