



- Staff/Thad Allton

Workers at West Ridge Mall got hot dogs from a temporary stand set up by Pete LaColla. He will have a restaurant in the food court.

A corner of New York to be in Topeka

By ANITA MILLER

Capital-Journal business editor

It conjures up images of a New York City street corner: a hot dog and pretzel vendor, taxi cab, and bright street scenes of tall buildings and people working at their trades.

And don't forget the manhole cover out in the street.

That New York street has been recreated at West Ridge Mall in Street Corner Cuisine, a restaurant that will feature "street corner" type food: New York-style hot dogs, shish kebabs, pretzels, French fries, and bagels. The restaurant will be in a 680-square-foot location in the food court area in the northwest corner of the mall.

The hot dog venture is the brainchild of Pete LaColla, a former street vendor who has relocated to Topeka from New York, and his former college professor, Dan McCabe, a lawyer in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. It is the first store of its kind for the pair, and LaColla hopes it is the first of many more to open.

"We had to do something unique to catch the attention of the leasing agents," LaColla said. "They're used to dealing with national chains, like McDonald's or others that have several stores. We were forced to do something unique and to set ourselves apart from the sea of other hot dog vendors."

The counter of the hot dog restaurant will be recessed at an angle, and on either side will

be two hot dog vendor carts. It is at the carts where customers will get their hot dogs and pretzels. Across the middle will be a wooden cart, where other food items will be displayed.

The condiments will be served from the front end of a taxi cab which will stick out of the mall about a foot. The "pump stations" for the mustard and catsup are built into the headlights, so every time a customer pushes the pump, the headlights will light up.

A curb will run along underneath the carts and a manhole cover will be located in the tile floor. Large paintings of New York City scenes will be the backdrop for the restaurant. A New York City artist, Charles Fazzino, was commissioned to do two paintings, which together will be reproduced to cover a space nine feet tall and 36 feet long.

"This is a snapshot of a section of a large city like New York," LaColla said.

LaColla has used all local suppliers and contractors -Tefft and Donaldson -for the restaurant. He found the taxi at Topeka Auto Salvage, and he's having a Topekan do the body work on it. The counters are being built by Zax, and will use facades of carts.

The hot dogs will be manufactured locally, and two styles will be served: regular and one with natural casing to keep the meat juices in while it cooks.

"It will be about 10 inches long, fairly thin and indigenous to New York," LaColla said. He said it will be similar to the Sabrett brand of hot dogs.

LaColla started his brainstorming when he was a part-time student at Dutchess Community College in Poughkeepsie and supporting himself by selling hot dogs at a stand from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. in front of a bar called Let's Dance. The name of his stand was Let's Eat.

"I wanted to get into something else. I was taking business course because I wanted to get off the street," LaColla said.

LaColla began discussing ideas with McCabe, his professor in two classes: Principals of Real Estate and the "ABCs of starting your own business."

"There was a new mall going up in Poughkeepsie and we wanted to get in it," LaColla said. The result was a learning -but frustrating -experience, with national outlets winning out. The two then began looking at mall developers and malls all over the country.

"We looked at a lot. We looked at projects in San Antonio, San Diego, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, upstate New York and Topeka," LaColla said. They decided to work with Melvin Simon & Associates at West Ridge Mall.

"This market was strong. It's a good mall and the type of development I wanted to be in," LaColla said.

He found on a prospecting trip to Topeka that the people "were just so friendly here. Topeka has a lot going for it. It has great potential for growth and this type of retail."