

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears above any article. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

Ex-Steak & Ale to Open As Chateau Brienn

Veteran restaurateur's business opening Monday at site on South Florida Avenue.

By *KYLE KENNEDY*

THE LEDGER

Published: Friday, July 8, 2011 at 2:56 a.m.

LAKELAND | A veteran of Lakeland's restaurant scene has taken over a well-known property for her newest venture.

Joanne List is readying Chateau Brienn for its official opening Monday at 5125 S. Florida Ave., the former site of Steak & Ale.

List, who previously operated JJ's Cafe in downtown Lakeland and Julianne's on U.S. 98 South, said she thinks Chateau Brienn has the right menu and location to be a success.

The 5,200-square-foot restaurant's debut has been months in the making, following extensive renovations that began in February.

"This building was rotting away, and it's sad to have a location as good as this not be the way it was years ago. It was very neglected and abused in here," List said.

Both Steak & Ale and a Lakeland Bennigan's abruptly closed three years ago when the parent company for the two chains filed for bankruptcy. The buildings sat empty after the closures.

Now, both locations are seeing new life at the same time. The Bennigan's, 3621 S. Florida Ave., is scheduled to be demolished and replaced with a Texas Roadhouse restaurant.

Chateau Brienn's offerings include steak, seafood, chicken and pasta dishes. Lunches are priced from about \$8 to \$12, List said, with dinner entrees ranging from



ERNST PETERS / THE LEDGER

Chateau Brienn, located at the former site of Steak & Ale on South Florida Avenue, is set to open Monday.

about \$16 to \$27.

"It's casual," List says. "We're not focusing on someone having to come here in a suit and a tie, but they will have a good dinner."

List had a successful nine-year run downtown with JJ's and also ran a thriving catering business. She opened Julianne's in December 2008, running it as a fine-dining restaurant and banquet hall, but List shuttered the site after two years.

Food wasn't the problem. A May 2009 review by The Ledger scored Julianne's four out of five stars, but it noted a potential weakness — location.

"If (List) can survive until diners find out she's there, Polk County will have one more place with great food," the review said.

Positioned on U.S. 98 South near Edgewood Drive and neighbored by a Pizza Hut, Julianne's seemed to be overlooked by passing motorists and never managed to draw consistent business, List said.

"I just couldn't get anybody in there to eat," List said. "It was a bad spot. It's a commuter road; the traffic on that road fooled me."

Chateau Briann has location working in its favor, but as an independent restaurateur List could still face a major challenge in sustaining the new business, said Larry Ross, a restaurant consultant and business professor at Florida Southern College in Lakeland.

The local restaurant scene is crowded and highly competitive, and establishing a new eatery can require very deep pockets, Ross said.

"That independent experience is a tough row to hoe," he said.

But List isn't new to the industry, and said she's focused on the "three powerful things in restaurants" — food, service and ambiance.

"I feel if you give good service and good food, you'll survive in the restaurant business if you're within the budget of what people are willing to pay," she said.

[Kyle Kennedy can be reached at kyle.kennedy@theledger.com or 863-802-7584.]

Copyright © 2011 TheLedger.com — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.