

Circus Cafe owners, Mayor Johnson and others in process of buying Sperry's restaurant in downtown Saratoga Springs

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SARATOGA SPRINGS — Christel and Colin MacLean, the owners of the popular Circus Café on Broadway, are taking over another downtown restaurant — Sperry's — as part of a group of investors that includes Mayor Scott Johnson.

“We're under contract for the purchase of the building and the restaurant,” Johnson said Saturday. He said the sale should be completed by the end of the month.

Johnson, a retired attorney and lifelong city resident, has fond memories of Sperry's and said he hopes to see the restaurant return to being one of the go-to places in downtown during the racing season and year-round. He is also a part-owner of Circus Café.

Sperry's, at 30-1/2 Caroline St., opened in the 1930s and has been a family-owned business for some 25 years. Longtime owner Ridge Qua kept the building but sold the restaurant to his brother, David Addison, who does not live locally.

The MacLeans will run both restaurants. Circus Café features American casual, while Sperry's will be “classic Saratoga tavern fare with a modern interpretation,” Christel Mac-Lean said. They intend to keep and revive specials of Sperry's heyday, including softshell crabs, pasta Bolognese and chicken liver pate.

“We love infusing new life into projects,” she said.

The MacLeans bought Hattie's on Phila Street from the original owner in 1993 and sold it in 2001; in 2004 they opened Circus Café, whose longtime chef is David Hernandez. For Sperry's, she said, “we have a lead on a fabulous chef” whom they'll pursue when the purchase is a done deal.

JMO Partners is buying the property and Sperry's Restaurant Group is buying the business, Johnson said. He deferred divulging the sale price and he and the MacLeans declined to name the other investors.

After the sale is final, Sperry's will close briefly for some quick cosmetic changes, he said. Then, during the winter, it will be shut down for some dramatic changes “to update the interior but maintain the character,” he said. “We're trying to save a Saratoga tradition.”

This would include bringing back lunches, and “restoring and elevating what Sperry's is to the community,” he said.

MacLean hopes to “make it again the place everyone wants to be.”