

## Out of the fire, into the kitchen: Local firefighter opens restaurant

By Holly Richrath, For the Camera

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LOUISVILLE -- Brendan McManus spends a great deal of time in the kitchen during his shifts as a firefighter at the Louisville Fire Department.

"I end up cooking for the crew a lot," he said.

However, the volunteer position doesn't quite pay the bills.

So, in addition to his training and shift requirements with the fire department, McManus recently joined forces with veteran chef Jim Cohen to open Old Town Louisville's newest culinary attraction: the Empire Lounge and Restaurant, located at the site of the former Pasquini's Pizzeria, 816 Main St.

McManus said that he and Cohen wanted to create a neighborhood American restaurant with a "familiar and welcoming" menu that makes use of the best-quality ingredients available.

"It's very multifaceted," Cohen said of the restaurant. "You can come here to have private parties with a luxurious menu, or to sit back and relax with some deviled eggs."

Cohen has been spicing up the culinary scene across the United States for 30 years. His resume boasts stints at Denver's Tante Louise -- where he was selected by Julia Child as one of the top 13 chefs in the country -- Vail's Cucina Rustica, Scottsdale, Ariz.'s Phoenician Resort and Las Vegas' Caesar's Palace.

The menu that Cohen has prepared for the Empire includes roasted acorn squash with candied walnuts and crème fresh, an egg-less Italian custard known as Panne Cotta with winter fruit soup, and a burger made from meat freshly ground on-site.

While Cohen focused on creating the menu, he credits McManus with the restaurant's new look.

"We wanted the atmosphere to be warm and welcoming," McManus said.

Caryn Greef, of Louisville, described the décor as "amazing."

"It's great that Louisville has such a cozy new place to eat," she said.

Cohen and McManus have yet to advertise their new dining retreat and they still have not changed the neon sign perched on top of the building that reads "Pasquini's." Yet they say they've had great business.



Photo by Mark Leffingwell

**Executive chef Jim Cohen finishes off a dish with some grated cheese at the Empire Lounge and Restaurant in Louisville.**



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"We've been really pleased with the response from guests and the amount of people we've seen," McManus said.

Cohen estimates about 90 percent of the customers he has spoken to are from Louisville.

"We're most excited about being in Old Town Louisville," Cohen said. "We love being a part of the small community."

Jenny Blanchard and friend Julie Barbera, both of Louisville, raved about the food at the Empire, as well as the "friendly" and "professional" staff.