

HENS HAVE WAREHOUSE DISTRICT BUZZING

Originally published in **The Blade** on Thursday, April 16, 2009

BY RYAN E. SMITH
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Sitting at a bar, beer mug at his side and baseball on TV, Jason Hineline could have been anywhere. But he wasn't. He was downtown. In Toledo. On a Monday night.

"It's beautiful!" the 28-year-old man from Curtice said while hanging out with a couple of buddies at the new Pizza Papalis restaurant next to Fifth Third Field.

"Toledo's starting to look like a real city again," he continued. "It's going to be a city that we're proud to be from."

When the Mud Hens opened their downtown ballpark in 2002, hopes were high that the surrounding blocks of the Warehouse District would become a hub of activity, full of eateries that buzzed on game days and into the off-season.

The new Hen House - which hosts the team's home opener today - was a hit with businesses already open, such as the Spaghetti Warehouse and the Bronze Boar. Seven years later, it's drawn even more entrepreneurs, seducing them with more than 580,000 fans who attended home games last season.

"I think that what you will find is that the owners of Fricker's and The Blarney and Pizza Papalis and Tony Packo's ... these are all folks that to some degree made their decision to move into the Warehouse District based on the number of people going to Fifth Third Field," said Joe Napoli, general manager of the Mud Hens. "What happened is what we could have hoped to happen."

Fans responded, many popping in for dinner before a game or stopping for a drink afterward. More importantly, that stream of revenue hasn't evaporated in the off-season.

"It's become a destination, especially with Pizza Papalis and us together here. There are weekends now where it looks like there's a game doing on," said Ed Beczynski, owner of The Blarney, which opened across Huron Street from the stadium in 2006.

"There are a lot of choices where you can now park and hop around," he continued. "We need more places like that."

Those who wander around the other side of the stadium can cross Washington Street and find businesses like Legends Bar and Grill (formerly the Durty Bird) and Packo's at the Park. Just a bit farther down St. Clair Street are Home Slice Pizza and Downtown Latte. The list goes on.

Packo's co-owner Tony Packo III said there's a great vibe to the neighborhood.

"Ten years from now, I hope we're looking back saying we were part of something special, we were part of that mustard seed that grew into something great," he said.

The lunch crowd at many of these restaurants helps, and Derek Feniger, founder of the group Focus on Young People, said the area can be "booming" at night and on the weekends too. It's on the right path, he



said, but not perfect.

"There's definitely a need for a little bit more loungy-type bars, maybe where the executives can go after work and relax," the 27-year-old said.

Diane Keil-Roe, president of the Toledo Warehouse District Association, has enjoyed watching the continuing transformation.

"People are very optimistic about the stuff that we see happening, even in this economy," she said.

Perhaps the best is yet to come, aided by the opening of an arena downtown this fall that should provide a pipeline of visitors to the area year-round. Already poised to benefit is Sidelines at the Arena, a sports bar on Huron that opened its doors a little more than a month ago.

That's where T.J. Rogers,, 30, of West Toledo, and some friends found themselves recently, watching the Detroit Tigers play on multiple big-screen televisions. It was fairly early in the evening and they had the place mostly to themselves. For the moment.

"Once the Mud Hens start, it's just going to be out of control out here," Rogers predicted.

Consider yourself warned: It's Opening Day.

Contact Ryan E. Smith at: ryansmith@theblade.com or 419-724-6103.



1. The Blarney Irish Pub, 601 Monroe St., 419-418-2339, www.theblarneyirishpub.com.

2. Pizza Papalis, 519 Monroe St., 419-244-7722, www.pizzapapalis.com.

3. Fricker's, 19 N. St. Clair St., 419-244-9464, www.frickers.com.

4. Legends Bar and Grill, 2. S. St. Clair St., 419-254-0964.

5. Home Slice Pizza, 28 S. St. Clair St., 419-724-7437, www.myspace.com/homeslicepizza.

6. Downtown Latte, 44 S. St. Clair St., 419-243-6032, www.downtownlatte.com.

7. Packo's at the Park, 7 S. Superior St., 419-246-1111, www.tonypackos.com.

8. Spaghetti Warehouse, 42, S. Superior St., 419-255-5038, www.meatballs.com.

9. Grumpy's, 34 S. Huron St., 419-241-6728, www.grumpys.net.

10. Easy Street Cafe, 822 Washington St., 419-255-0010, www.easystreetcafe.net.

11. Sidelines at the Arena, 233 N. Huron St., 419-244-5151, www.sidelinesportseater.com.

[< previous](#)

[next >](#)