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## Kilkenny House opens; adds Irish flair

by Leslie Murray/The Chronicle

Monday September 22, 2008, 10:45 AM



Leslie Murray/The Chronicle

Kilkenny House owner Barry O'Donovan poses in front of the fireplace. To open the "traditional Irish pub with American flair", O'Donovan completely renovated the location over four-and-a-half months. Since opening the doors last week, Kilkenny House has drawn a steady stream of visitors and constant community support.

CRANFORD -- When patrons walk into Kilkenny House, owner Barry O'Donovan wants them to think of it as home.

"To me you're coming into my living room," O'Donovan said of the restaurant and bar that opened on Wednesday, Sept. 10. "You feel the comfort from the moment you walk in the door," he said.

Kilkenny House, named after O'Donovan's hometown of Kilkenny, Ireland, opened last week after taking over the South Avenue location that had previously been Antone's.

A six-year resident of Cranford, O'Donovan sold his former restaurant in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn to open Kilkenny House. With a full list of libations and a more select but equally refined menu selection, O'Donovan described his new location "as a traditional Irish pub with an American flair." He spent four years searching the area for a new location and while he came close to moving on other

locations, it was Cranford that he kept returning to. "I kept coming back to here," he explained. What followed after he closed on the sale in May were four-and-a-half months of renovations which included a complete internal demolition and a new facade for the building. "Everything is new," O'Donovan said, adding that even the wood floors were replaced.

With dark wood and leather appointments, a pair of stone fireplaces that offer a cozy feel to the main room and the smaller "parlor" in the back, the yellow marble painted walls of Kilkenny House are decorated with framed photos of Kilkenny (framed at the Artist's Framer in Cranford), plaques of Irish beers, even a photo of O'Donovan's parents on their wedding day. A steady stream of Irish musicians plays over the radio, finishing the effect. O'Donovan said he hopes the main dining room, with a half-dozen televisions, will become a regular sports stop for both American and European football. The parlor is the place for a quiet chat and he plans to bring in live music throughout the year.

While he had announced plans to open in mid-summer, the required renovations pushed back the opening. In working with township officials, O'Donovan called the process "strict but very fair". For its part, the community support has been "tremendous" he added. Through out the renovation process, O'Donovan said the work drew plenty of attention from passersby.

"Every day, we had people in and everybody got a tour," he said. What's more, O'Donovan said he received support in finding the location to making in through the process of opening Kilkenny House from his family,

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wife Peggy Murray and sons Kevin and Tim, and from the Downtown Management Corporation (DMC) staff. He gave additional credit to DMC director Kathleen Miller Prunty.

"It's basically because of her that I came to Cranford," O'Donovan explained. For her part Prunty called the opening of Kilkenny House exciting, saying that it adds to "a really nice collection of restaurants" that already exists in the downtown.

"I really am thrilled both professionally and personally," she said. Even with the grand opening of Kilkenny House still undecided, there have been packed crowds since the first night the doors opened. "It's been absolutely wonderful," O'Donovan said.

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