

Burger Bar Crescent resists the temptation of franchising - for now

By Mike Cohen
The Suburban

It has been just over a year since brothers Morrie and Ari Baker took perhaps the biggest gamble of their lives and decided to open a restaurant on busy downtown Crescent Street. Burger Bar Crescent (www.burgerbarcrescent.com), it turned out, was just the right concept and business could not be better.

The menu is mouth watering from the get go, with an array of starters, no less than 16 different kinds of burgers, half a dozen sandwich choices, desserts and coffees. It is not surprising to learn then that there has been significant interest expressed by outside parties for an opportunity to franchise the concept elsewhere in the city.

"So far we have resisted the temptation," says Morrie, who cut his teeth in the dining business by starting up three Ben and Jerry's locales in Montreal going back 25 years ago.

Almost two years ago Morrie was walking down Crescent Street when he noticed that a Mexican restaurant called Los Tois had closed down. The spot was available and the person to call was the same landlord as his Ben and Jerry's. "I do not know what it was that hit me," Morrie recalls. "I picked up the phone and leased the place without even stepping inside. I did not even have a business plan in mind."

Morrie partnered with his brother Ari. "We honestly did not know where to begin," he said. "Somehow, we just knew it would be a hamburger place and that everything would be homemade."

Planning the menu began with the consensus that everything would be made in house and not frozen. "We knew we had to be different," Ari says. "So from fresh hamburger patties made each day to hand cut fries, we knew what was important."

The two level, 100 seat dining establish-



Morrie and Ari Baker.

ment opened on May 24, 2011. There is also a seasonal terrace.

While the menu is constantly changing, there are already a slew of customer favorites. The panko breaded mozzarella cheese sticks with spicy salsa; chicken wings with Jack Daniels bbq sauce; the Big Salad; sweet potato fries; and classic poutine. As for the burgers, unique they

are. I sampled the Montreal Smoked Meat Burger, which has a AAA beef patty topped with Dunn's Famous smoked meat, Jarlsberg cheese, kosher dill pickle and yellow mustard. Morrie is friends with Dunn's owner Elliott Kligman. "There is no other smoked meat I would have used," he says.

Other popular burgers include the bison, the baba, the hangover, the firestorm and yes - the poutine. The latter is big seller among the university crowd. Then there is the hundred dollar burger, which will cost you a cool \$24.95. The crispy crunch fried chicken sandwich is another menu favorite. Keep the calorie count going for the desserts, from pies and cakes to ice cream sundaes.

Burger Bar Crescent is located at 1465 Crescent Street. They do deliver in the immediate vicinity. You can read more about the Bakers and see our video interview with them in *The Suburban* Magazine, online now at thesuburban.com. ■

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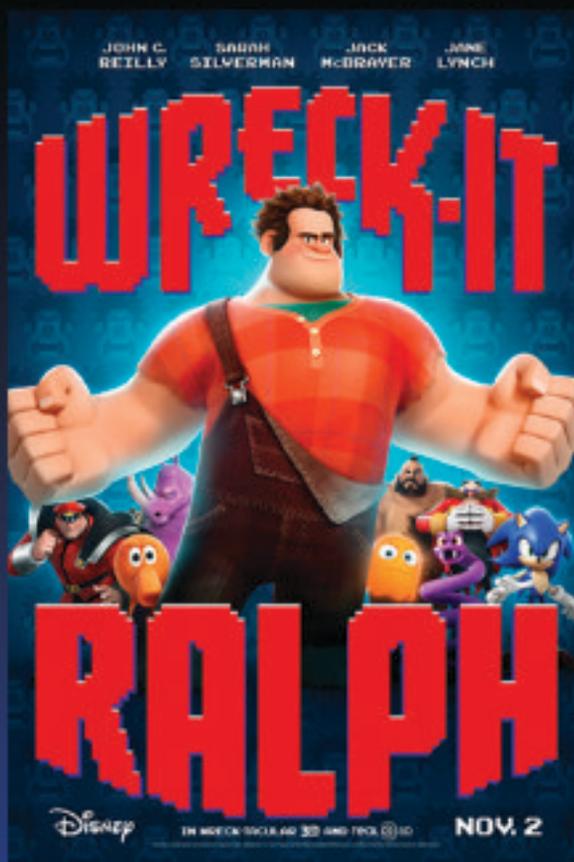
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