

A look at restaurants in Sioux Falls: What's in a name?

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Abstract: Marketing experts say it's becoming more important for businesses to capture customers' attention with a memorable name. Quirky names, like Se-or Weiner, Nutty's Pub and Grill and Chedd's Grilled Cheese suggest a fun atmosphere.

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Full text: The name of Kristina Kuehn's restaurant is one letter, K. It's not Kaye, OK or K Restaurant. It's just K. The simplicity has generated some confusion. Phone books initially left out the restaurant name from listings. Customers call the restaurant and think that employees are saying "OK."

"Nobody gets it," Kuehn says. "... It's the initial of my first and last name. But people get so confused."

Like many restaurant owners, Kuehn debated over the name. Her previous restaurant names, Kristina's Cafe & Bakery and Cafe 334, both at 334 S. Phillips Ave., included more information on the type of eatery.

Kuehn says restaurant name should reflect the personality of the owner. "The restaurant is filled with things that have come out of my life - my travels, songs that I used to listen to when I was in college. It has a lot of me in the restaurant."

Marketing experts say it's becoming more important for businesses to capture customers' attention with a memorable name.

Larger cities are filled with unusually named restaurants. For many owners, it's a way to draw in customers. The Strip Club Meat and Fish in St. Paul plays off the name of its specialty, strip steak, and, of course, a little double entendre.

Owner Tim Niver says the name has worked for the restaurant. "One of the reasons that we named it what we did is that it draws attention. We're in a diverse part of St. Paul, and it's a destination for people to get here. ... We had to get them here with something that was funny."

Many new Sioux Falls restaurants are trying out eccentric names: Big Cheese Pizza, 18th Amendment, kRav'N and Bro's BrasserieAmericano will open later this year.

"Naming a restaurant, a business, is just like naming a child," says Rand Wergin, a marketing professor at the Beacom School of Business at the University of South Dakota. "You want some signature characteristics - easy to say, easy to remember. It's helpful if it's easy to spell."

A company has a short window to grab a customer's attention. "It needs to be distinctive, attractive, compelling," Wergin says.

But creative names come with risks. Sometimes an unusual name doesn't make sense or can be offensive, Wergin says. "The jeopardy ... is that you (the customer) can have a reaction to them, and that can be hard to overcome."

Sioux Falls has its fair share of unconventional restaurant and bar names. Quirky names, like Se-or Weiner, Nutty's Pub and Grill and Chedd's Grilled Cheese suggest a fun atmosphere. Other names, like Spezia and Wild Sage Grille, cater to customers looking for a more upscale experience.

Some names just seem to work. Minerva's has been a stalwart restaurant at Phillips Avenue and 11th Street since 1977.

A year after Stacy Newcomb Weiland opened her restaurant, Parker's Bistro, she's still content with the name. She says it represents what the restaurant is - an upscale bistro.

"It was a process that I worked through. At one point, we thought about a French name," Newcomb Weiland

says about naming her first restaurant. "We wanted to be able to explore all avenues of food. I felt like ... we landed on something that wouldn't predetermine what people thought of it."

Parker's is named after her father, Parker William Newcomb, who owned a cafe called Dino's in Madison. The "bistro" in the name allowed the cuisine to be more adaptable, she says.

The restaurant has a strong French influence but still has a mix of Italian and nouveau American cuisine. It's a place where you can feel comfortable in jeans and a T-shirt or in dressy attire to attend the orchestra, Newcomb Weiland says.

A restaurant name alludes to the experience that a customer will have, says Ted Heeren, co-owner of advertising agency Fresh Produce.

"When you go to a restaurant, you're looking for a certain quality, tone or experience. The name needs to cut through to that - the experience. The name is evoking a feeling, and that feeling is inspired by the type of atmosphere and experience you'd like to provide your customers."

Katie Fonder says the name of her new restaurant, kRav'N, was a marketing idea. The spelling is a take on the word craving.

"It's like, what are you craving? Craving food, craving beer? Stop in." Mark and Katie Fonder will open the bar and restaurant kRav'N at 74th Street and Connie Avenue in November or December. The Fonders also own 212 The Boiling Point in Brandon.

Picking a restaurant name that is difficult to spell, like kRav'N, or pronounce can be a gamble, Wergin says.

"Some argue that that uniqueness makes it memorable. I am not an advocate of that because uniqueness does make it memorable but doesn't mean it's in a positive light. Uniqueness that is both memorable and positive is much better than bad publicity."

Regulars can get fairly attached to a restaurant name. In 2004, when Theo's restaurant became 601 Arota after 16 years in business, some customers were upset, says Fontenille, who was part-owner of Theo's.

The name 601 Arota came from the restaurant's address, 601 W. 33rd St., and arota, which is a combination of two Greek words meaning love, family and food, Fontenille says.

The name of gourmet cupcakery Oh My Cupcakes was developed by owner Melissa Johnson's 7-year-old son, Brandon. The storefront location opened April 1 in the Tri-State Creamery Building.

"We were were prepared to name it Cupcake Days," Johnson says. "At our house, we are committed to not taking the Lord's name in vain. We always say, 'Oh, my goodness. Oh, my stars.' ... Brandon, then 5, started saying, 'Oh, my cupcakes,' as an expression."

It's working for them. "It's very important to stand out," she says.

Se-or Wiener uses a dressed-up hot dog in its marketing and phrases that play off of the name. It has helped attract customers, says owner Noreen Jorgensen. "It's the ultimate play on words. It's just so much fun. A lot of times, they (customers) come in giggling and leave giggling."

Rob Horrocks is the general manager of The Liebrary and a new bar and grill, 18th Amendment, which will open in early October in the former Ground Round building on 41st Street.

The location is named after the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which established prohibition and is the only amendment ever to be repealed.

"The 18th Amendment is just a reminder that your right for something perfectly legal at this day and age can be taken away, just on the whim," Horrocks says. "Your rights should not be taken away - your right to a glass of wine, a beer."

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Restaurants to open this fall

kRav'N, 74th Street and Connie Avenue

Type of food: pizzas, burgers, wings, homemade soups and salads

Tentative opening: November or December

18th Amendment bar and grill, 1301 W. 41st St.

Type of food: gourmet pizza, other items like chicken wings and burgers

Tentative opening: October

Big Cheese Pizza, 1301 E. Benson Road

Type of food: homemade pizza, salads, sandwiches and appetizers

Tentative opening day: Late September/early October

Bro's Brasserie Americano, 334 S. Phillips Ave.

Type of food: fresh fish, steaks, homemade pastas and specialty desserts

Tentative opening: Mid-September

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