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Business

Taps will flow in Evans at The Plaza

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Self-serve taproom and tapas bar will bring downtown Augusta flair to Columbia County.

“What a day,” Dave Matthews sings in the song “Stay.” “Want to stay, stay, stay, stay for a while.”

And that’s what Renee Hajek hopes people do at her soon-to-open self-serve taproom and tapas bar, Stay.Social Tap & Table.

The space will have a downtown Augusta vibe, but it will be in the heart of Columbia County in The Plaza building just across the street from Evans Town Center Park.

“Columbia County needs this,” Hajek said. “A place to unwind and play board games and card games. A place to sit wherever and just hang out.”

The 2,400-square-foot bar and eatery will occupy the street level suite of The Plaza, the cornerstone office and retail building in Columbia County’s neo-urban experiment near its future performing arts center.

Stay patrons will serve themselves using radio-frequency identification bracelets that record purchases and monitor the customer’s beer and wine consumption.

There will be 41 beer taps (inspired by the Dave Matthews Band song "#41") and a kiosk where customers can order tapas food served charcuterie-style on handmade boards.

"It's all family-style," Hajek said. "It took me a couple of years to really try to create an experience for our guests instead of just a place to come and eat."

Hajek was partly inspired by a similar self-serve pub, The Alley Downtown Taproom in downtown Aiken, S.C., although The Alley does not serve food.

Most of Hajek's inspiration comes from her late husband David, who was a home-brew aficionado and lover of craft beer.

The Hajeks also were devoted Dave Matthews Band fans, which is why the restaurant has so many allusions to his songs.

David Hajek, a financial adviser with Morgan Stanley, died of esophageal cancer in 2017. He was 43.

"In the two years I've been working on this, I really tried to make this a tribute to him and our life together," she said. "Everything is unique and will have a meaning behind it."

The mother of three is planning to have Amber Connor, owner of Sinless Sweets, offer guilt-free desserts to complement the self-serve libations and chef Ryan Alford's creations.

Connor, a personal trainer at Evans Fitness Club, uses almond and coconut flour instead refined white flour, and uses a natural sweetener in place of sugar to cut calories.

"I take regular, unhealthy – but good – desserts and make them healthy," she said. "It lets people enjoy their desserts without feeling guilty about it. My slogan is 'Treats with the Cheats,' so you can still have your cake and eat it, too."

Stay. will offer grab-and-go breakfast items and feature fruit juices made by Tina Dahl, program manager at Helms College's culinary program.

Hajek is one of the first Destination Retail Incentive recipients, a recently approved Columbia County program that offers businesses locating in The Plaza area low- to no-cost loans up to \$100,000.

Meybohm Vice President Jordan Collier, who oversees leasing at The Plaza building, said Stay. is exactly the kind of tenant the company was hoping to attract. The real estate firm turned down nail salons, national chain restaurants and an insurance office to find a user who could create a hangout on the patio level.

"We weren't really willing to give that space to just about anybody," Collier said of the corner suite. "I think the idea, when we first saw it, kind of hit home for us. Ultimately it complements the vision of we're starting over there."

Hajek said she plans to have social event such as live music and cornhole board tournaments to "really bring the community together." Columbia County's neo-urban zone between the future Performing Arts Center and Evans Town Center Park permits open containers, meaning patrons could order a plastic pint of beer to take with them to events at the nearby Lady A Pavilion.

The taproom, scheduled to open the first week of August, has an indoor seating capacity of 95 and 50 on the patio. The COVID-19 pandemic will mean indoor patrons will have to maintain social distance under pandemic protocols.

Hajek said Stay. will offer the kind of vibe that Columbia County residents can only find in Richmond County.

"We want people to stay local," she said. "We're all about celebrating the local community. Each one of my taps will be branded with logos of other businesses that are supporting me."

She said the ultimate goal is to create the kind of business her husband would have built if he had the chance.

“Through the grief process of losing him I had to really dig into the next phase of my life by bringing honor to him,” Hajek said. “Everything you see will have a story to it.

“He would be proud of me,” she said. “He would.”