

EAST COOPER

Irish pub fulfillment of longtime dream

BY NADINE PARKS
Of The Post and Courier Staff

A small piece of Ireland has found a home in the Olde Village in North Charleston.

Just look for the flag of Ireland on East Montague Avenue outside the city's new Irish pub, Madra Rua.

About 10 years ago, a young Irish lad named Stephen O'Connor moved to the United States with the intention of becoming an electrical engineer.

He's done just about everything but that since he crossed the ocean, including drafting, construction and working as a bartender.

He ended up as a project manager building residential homes in the East Cooper area.

That's when he stumbled across a quaint little village on Montague Avenue and decided to fulfill his longtime dream of owning a traditional Irish pub.

"That street has so much potential. I saw a perfect opportunity to do a neighborhood pub," O'Connor said.

"It was just a positive feeling that this was the right time and the right place and the right street," he said.

O'Connor bought a former, 1,200-



Friends (back row, from left) Jason Rogers, Matt Gable and (front row, from left) Tanya Leon and Chad Price enjoy a St. Patrick's Day lunch at Madra Rua.

NADINE PARKS/STAFF

square-foot bar at 1034 East Montague Ave. from husband and wife Sue and Johnny Thigpen and went to work on the renovations.

"It seemed like the perfect size," O'Connor said. "Of course, it needed a lot of work. But the vision was there."

After six weeks of demolition, a carpenter spent eight weeks build-

ing a bar and several eating nooks with the deep rich cypress wood that gives Madra Rua its aged, European feel.

"It's a small, cozy atmosphere where people can have a small bite to eat, a chat, a pint and perhaps read the newspaper," O'Connor said.

The restaurant serves traditional Irish food, such as Irish stew, shepherd's pie and fish and chips. Traditional Irish brown bread is baked fresh on site and served with all meals.

Of course, you can get a burger or wings there, too, O'Connor said. Madra Rua had a unofficial opening March 3, and already had established a regular lunch clientele before the grand-opening event on St. Patrick's Day.

"We had a great reaction from the neighborhood, and we've been pretty busy every day," he said.

Local performer Pete Ledbetter plays traditional Irish tunes Tuesday evenings, and O'Connor hopes to add more performers as time goes by.

A common question for O'Connor is whether you can get a pint of green beer at Madra Rua.

The answer: Only on St. Patrick's Day.

"It's really an American thing," O'Connor said. "But I was talked into doing it for St. Patrick's Day."

Madra Rua means Red Fox in the Gaelic language.

"I always loved that name," O'Connor said.

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