News

TopShelf

Rasika serves up new West End nosh with panache

By Missy Frederick

Palak chaat has found a second home.

The signature crispy spinach appetizer at modern Indian restaurant **Rasika**, which has a nearly obsessive following among local foodies, can now be found on two D.C. menus.

Rasika West End, from entrepreneur **Ashok Bajaj**, was scheduled to open March 30 at 1177 22nd St. NW and will be the sister restaurant to his original spot, being rechristened Rasika Penn Quarter to avoid confusion.

Much at the new place will seem familiar to longtime Rasika fans – dishes like the Indian-influenced black cod and the marriage of modern cooking techniques with traditional Indian dishes like lamb korma.

But there is a wider selection of entrees and a new section of snack-y dishes called "nosh," a unique take on calamari with red chili and garlic. (Is "nosh" the new food descriptor of 2012? It's in the revamped 2941 menu too).

Beverage director **Alexander Carlin** says he is going to introduce several shareable punches for the patio and focus on modern drinks with Indian ingredients like rose syrups and mango (he's particularly excited about a new spin on the classic New Orleans Vieux Carre cocktail).

Wines will be accessible, with an emphasis on pairings like Syrah and rosé. At some point, Carlin would like to add Indian wine to the list.

The feel of the new Rasika West End is definitely different. Designed by Martin Vahtra, the space has lots of greens and purples and tree-influenced designs (one sculpture represents the Banyan tree, India's national tree).

There are multiple private dining spaces and a chef's table. Rasika Penn Quarter's **Vikram Sunderam** and **Manish Tyagi**, who will be in the kitchen most days, collaborated on the menu.

D.C. residents will just have to stick to buying their cosmetics at the regular old CVS, come May.

CVS Caremark Corp. is pulling the plug on its **Beauty 360** stores, which sold only beauty products. The company will close all 25 Beauty 360 stores, including one in D.C. at 1350 Connecticut Ave NW. The online store also is being shuttered.

Beauty 360 was meant to offer specialty cosmetic brands, some exclusive to CVS.

I broke the news in 2008 that D.C. would be the concept's first home. We basically looked through cracks in the paper covering the storefront wall to see what was going on inside. Investigative reporting at its finest.

Shelly's Back Room keeps expanding outward.

The owner is adding "Shelly's Front Porch" to the cigar bar, a popular haunt with lawyers and lobbyists at 1331 F St. NW. Owner **Bob Materazzi** tells me he put the finishing touches on the patio, about 300 square feet with 12 seats. A white picket fence surrounds the patio, which has Adirondack-style chairs.

Last year, Materazzi added a 1,000-square-foot "fireplace room," which has a bourbon theme with lots of dark wood and what he calls a "manly" feel, so the restaurant can host private events.

He has invested about $480,000 in the changes, including a high-end ventilation system so the room can be used for non-smoking lunches during the week.

The expansion helped sales jump 23 percent in 2011, and Materazzi hopes the patio will give Shelly's another boost. The closing of a beauty shop next door gave Materazzi room for that expansion.

The additional seating makes Shelly's feel a bit less crowded, added Materazzi, who bought the place in 2000.

Since the existing triathlon supply store wasn't enough to sustain Falls Church residents, the city's about to get a second.

Tri-360 has signed a lease in Falls Church, as blog readers learned recently. It's a new concept, and details are few at this point.

But the company has leased 3,971 square feet at the Crescent apartment project at Lee Highway and North Westmoreland Street. An opening date for the store wasn't available.

Brokers Lance Marine and Michael Zacharia of CBRE Group Inc. represented landlord United Dominion Realty in the transaction.

Meanwhile, between that and the nearby Bonzai Sports shop in my 'hood, it's about time for Top Shelf to learn how to ride a bike without falling off at red lights. It's an issue.

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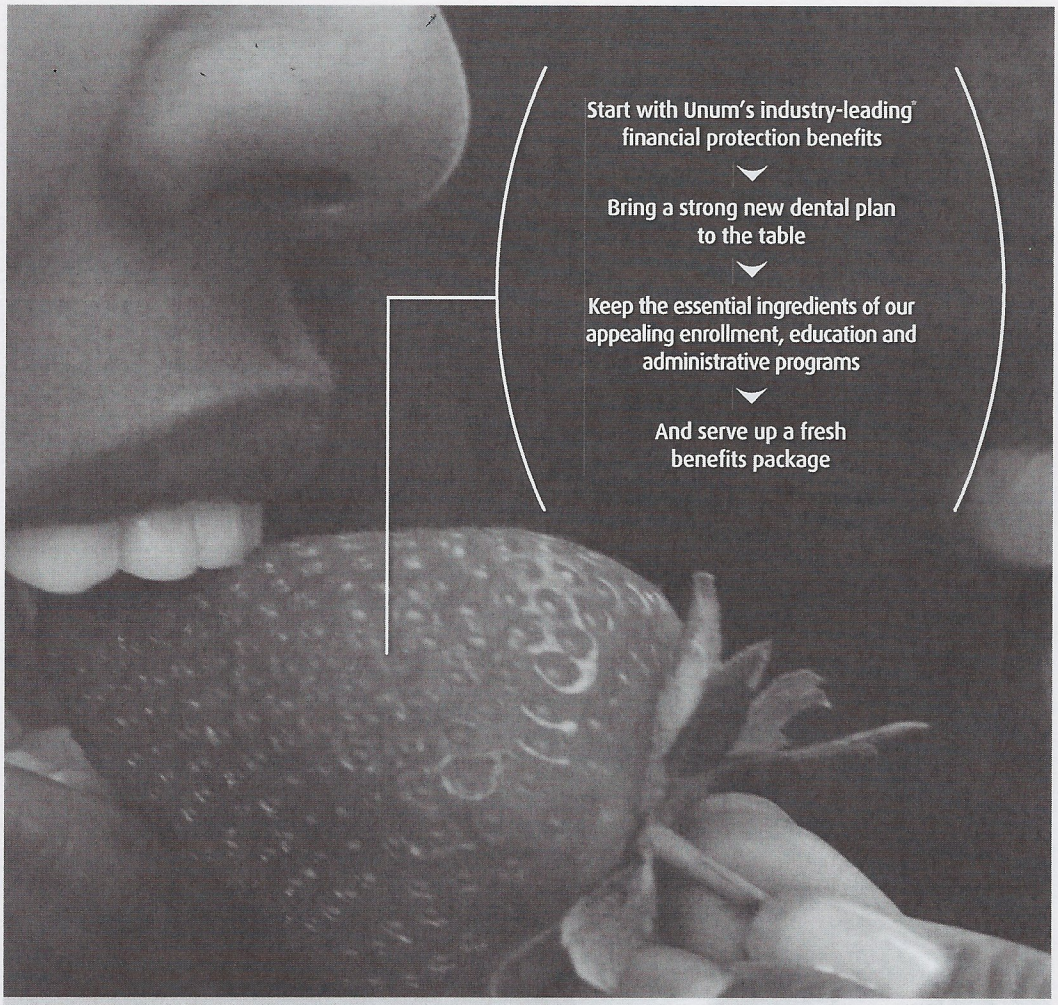

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