



Moving one block could prove a game changer for Evanston Games and Cafe

Shun Graves, Assistant City Editor

For Evanston Games and Cafe, moving one block meant moving mountains.

Long located on a quiet block of Maple Avenue just behind the Davis Street Metra station, the store — simultaneously a retailer, cafe and event space — struggled to attract walk-ins, co-owner Eli Klein said.

“As of January, I had owned that location for seven years,” Klein said. “I still got people at least once a week, if not every day, saying, ‘Oh, I had no idea you were here. When did you open?’ On that street, there’s no visibility. There’s no foot traffic.”

The store reopened Tuesday in its new, expanded digs at Church Street Plaza in the busier 1700 block of Maple Avenue. Several businesses have opened new locations in the last few months at the now-bustling shopping center, anchored by movie theater AMC Evanston 12.

Since closing at its erstwhile location Sunday, Evanston Games and Cafe rolled everything up the street to its new storefront, which sits at the foot of the escalator up to AMC.

“The kitchen closed at 6 p.m. so we could wheel the fridge down the street,” Klein said. “It was a combination of car trips — and anything that could roll, we just took down the sidewalk.”

The new space, a former restaurant, already had a bar and kitchen, so Evanston Games and Cafe will still offer patrons food and drinks. The menu lists various sandwiches, hot drinks and snacks for sale alongside the board and card games.

The eclectic combination of food and board games seemed like a no-brainer, Klein added. Many customers stay for hours while playing the store’s scheduled challenges of Magic: The Gathering, Dungeons & Dragons and other games — meaning they’d dash out for food anyway.

Evanston Games and Cafe’s proprietors also own the Bitter Blossom bar, which sits next door at Church Street Plaza. The game store plans to add its own lounge, selling canned adult beverages alongside hosting tournaments, co-owner Drew Lipoff said.



Shun Graves/The Daily Northwestern

Customers showed up to Evanston Games and Cafe’s grand opening at its new location Tuesday.

“We’re just excited to be able to do everything we were trying to do but couldn’t because we didn’t have the people, we didn’t have the area or we didn’t have the space,” he added.

In a downtown still grappling with office and retail vacancies, Church Street Plaza has seen strong momentum in recent months. Hot dog hawker Devil Dawgs moved in last month, following the Sky Zone indoor park’s December debut and Egg Harbor Cafe’s November arrival there.

The new storefronts at the shopping center sandwiched between the Chicago Transit Authority and Metra tracks have reinvigorated the district, Downtown Evanston Executive Director Andy Vick said.

“It really is an exciting rebirth, if you will, for that whole plaza area,” he added. “I hope it continues, and I hope it spreads to other parts of downtown.”

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