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Iconic Fairfield restaurant to close Saturday

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FAIRFIELD — The name Symmes Tavern evokes a sense of nostalgia like few other names can in the city of Fairfield.

That is one reason why Joe Schwarz acquired the name he gave his restaurant, Symmes Tavern on the Green, as one of the marquee attractions for the then-newly opened Village Green in 2003.

It's become a popular institution among the city's core and, like the iconic television bar "Cheers," it's a place where everyone knows your name.

Those days, however, will come to an end on Saturday when Symmes Tavern on the Green permanently closes. But the void it will leave is expected to be filled a few weeks later when Fairfield graduate Andy Castle relocates his barbecue restaurant from northern Hamilton County to his hometown.

"It will be missed," said Fairfield Chamber of Commerce CEO and President Kert Radel said of Symmes Tavern on the Green. "It's always a sad day when you have a name that's been an institution that goes away."

But the name isn't going away completely, said Castle.

Butt Shack BBQ Grill, which Castle says is more than just a barbecue joint, will re-brand the building, and said the Symmes Tavern name will be ever-present inside.

"The Symmes name has been around for a long time," said the 1995 Fairfield graduate. And keeping ties to the past "is very important."

The Symmes Tavern dates back to the mid-19th century, and the original tavern at the corner of Pleasant Avenue and Nilles Road, closed in 1980. It's now a Chase Bank.

The pictures and all Symmes Tavern-related items will remain, Castle said.

"We want to keep the name alive and we want to keep the people in Fairfield happy," he said.

Joe Schwarz, who will maintain ownership of the building, said though the moment of closing down his restaurant that opened in January 2003 is bittersweet, it's time to move on and focus on his primary business — home building and land development.

"The home-building business and the land-development business for 10 years have been in a recession, and that's ending," he said. "We're busy. This is going to alleviate a lot of time for our core business."

Symmes Tavern on the Green was important for Fairfield, said Ron D'Epifanio, a former city mayor. He was on city council in the late 1990s when the Village Green project was still a concept and said "We really needed an anchor restaurant. There were very few restaurants (at the time) where you go in and sit down and have a nice dinner."

D'Epifanio said he's not surprised Schwarz decided to pull out of the restaurant business, a business he said is "gruelling."

Schwarz, who said he'll likely be a regular customer at the Butt Shack BBQ Grill, hopes the success he's experienced "continues for the new owner."

Castle said he's going to bring 90 percent of his employees from his Greenhills Butt Shack BBQ Grill location, plans to hire most Symmes Tavern on the Green employees and still is looking to hire 20 additional positions.

Interviews for positions are set from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 20, at the soon-to-be-relocated Fairfield spot, 500 Wessel Drive. It will take a few weeks to re-open the new restaurant.

"Our goal and our focus is on customer service, quality food and consistency," he said.

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