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It's still Hunter's: State's second licensed bar and grill back in operation

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By Jonathan Turner, jturner@qconline.com

ROCK ISLAND – Like a culinary cool cat, Hunter's Club just keeps purring back to life.

Shuttered for many months during the past two years, the downtown landmark at 2107 4th Ave., is under new ownership and has a fresh new shine, as well as a bunch of new menu items.

Local real estate investor Brad Emmert bought the 77-year-old bar and grill “because of the history, the name Hunter's, and the challenge to bring something back,” he said Wednesday. “I was looking for another project.”

Mr. Emmert -- who also does residential financing nationwide – owned Bradley D's Pizza in Moline for three years in the mid-1990s. This is his first restaurant venture since.

He has put in \$60,000 worth of renovations into Hunter's, including four flat-screen TVs, a new sound system, carpeting, ceiling tiles, kitchen equipment, a cooler at the bar and free Wi-Fi access. The bar opened last month and the restaurant at the end of July – with new pizzas, calzones, homemade fries and chips, chicken, fajitas and veggie wraps on the menu.

“A lot of people are glad we're open again,” Mr. Emmert said. “It's good food, it's good atmosphere. A lot of people reminisce at the tables about the old times.”

Founded in 1931 as a speakeasy, Hunter's Club received the second liquor license in Illinois in 1933. The first went to a Chicago bar off Wabash Avenue that since has gone out of business, making Hunter's the holder of the state's oldest liquor license.

Mark Polaschek, an East Moline businessman, bought the building and Hunter's Club business in 2000. Ruhl & Ruhl Realtor Ray McDevitt -- former owner of Dalton's, now



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Photo: Paul Colletti

Hunter's in Rock Island recently reopened with an updated interior. Bartender J.J. Raterink, owner Brad Emmert and server Denise Emmert show off the establishment's new ambiance and fare.



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Photo: Paul Colletti

Hunter's at 2107 4th ave. in Rock Island.

Kilkenny's Pub in downtown Davenport -- came on as co-owner in June 2006.

They spent about \$500,000 in renovations and re-opened Hunter's in December 2006, and closed in late February 2008. The building was later put up for sale for \$349,000.

The 115-seat restaurant now has 15 employees, and is open 10:30 a.m. to 1 a.m. seven days a week. The grill closes at 10 p.m.

The latest Hunter's features its classic half-pound Black Angus burger (\$5.50), a Friday night full catfish dinner (\$10.95) and \$6 daily specials of jumbo breaded tenderloin and fries (Monday), three tacos (Tuesday), French dip and fries (Wednesday), and Reuben on rye with fries (Thursday). It also offers a cheeseburger basket with fries for \$3.50 on Mondays.

Its dinners include an 8-ounce flat iron steak for \$12, similar to the old Velie's Falstaff steak. It is a long, thin piece of meat, sometimes called a top blade steak. A catfish filet dinner (two breaded filets) is \$10, and others include shrimp and pork chops, with dinners including vegetable and choice of baked potato or rice pilaf and Texas toast.

There is a much wider selection of appetizers than the old Hunter's, which include jalapeño poppers, black and tan beer-battered onion rings, quesadillas, hot wings, loaded nachos, and filled potato skins. Other sandwiches and burgers include chicken tenders, BBQ pulled pork, Philly cheese steak, grilled chicken and a shrimp basket.

The bar includes a large wine and beer selection, including 12 beers on draft, from \$2.75 to \$3.50 per glass, Mr. Emmert said.

He wants to return Hunter's as a showcase for quality jazz and blues music, both piped in and live. Slim and the Gang will perform this Saturday night, and the Manny Lopez band will play on Sept. 19 and 20.

The Illinois smoking ban is not hurting the business, and in fact attracts customers that did not enjoy coming to a smoky bar in the past, Mr. Emmert said. "A lot of people don't want smoke in a restaurant."

Hunter's may add breakfast – starting at 6 a.m. -- in about two months, and is looking to feature live music outdoors and re-paint the exterior by the fall, Mr. Emmert said. Menu selections are also available for take-out, he said.

Hunter's phone number is (309) 793-5030.