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HOME NEWS COLUMNISTS
Parker: Spike in gas prices spells end for restaurant

January 4, 2006
Say ciao to Mao.
The hipper-than-hip Mao Asian Bistro and Sushi Lounge, 201 Columbine St., shut down New Year's Day. Mao, which opened in December 2003, had been losing diners and money, said owner Jim Sullivan.

"Ever since the spike in gas prices, our numbers didn't ever rebound very well," Sullivan said. "I decided in September I was going to give it until the end of the year to see if we could turn it around."

Sullivan estimated that the restaurant did \$3 million in business the first year, but had slipped to \$1.8 million in 2005. Not counting the price of the land, Sullivan had invested \$5 million in the building, furniture and fixtures.

Sullivan, a well-known Denver developer, is a veteran in Denver's restaurant scene as a partner in the old Jimmy's in Glendale, the Rattlesnake Grill in the Cherry Creek mall, and his new eatery Emogene Cafe (next to Mao) and nine75 at 975 Lincoln.

While Mao opened with a big bang (including the controversial name, after the Chinese dictator, and the nude videos that ran Thursday through Saturday nights until they were yanked), the restaurant couldn't find its fine dining legs.

"Part of the frustration is that while Denver certainly appreciates fine dining restaurants, they're not places where people prefer to eat every night," Sullivan said, pointing to the demise of Adegas, a posh and pricey place on 18th Street and Wynkoop that closed in August after a three-year run.

"I'm not mad at Denver. I failed to give people what they wanted."

Mao's financial partnership between Little Ollie's owner Charlie Huang and Sullivan also ended at midnight New Year's Eve.

Sometime next month Sullivan will open Ocean in the same space, a more moderately priced seafood and steak restaurant.

All images of Mao and the red and black interior will be replaced with blue-tone ocean colors. Lunch will be added to the menu in April or May. (Any outstanding gift certificates for Mao will be honored in full at nine75 or Ocean.)

"Every seafood restaurant in Denver is packed," Sullivan said. "Look at Jax, McCormick's, even Landy's, which is awful."

Sullivan vows to reopen Mao in another location - most likely not in Colorado - sometime in the future.

"I love Mao," he said.

"I'm going to miss it."

HEADING WEST: Denver chef Ian Kleinman left Mao before the doors closed, accepting a head chef position at a new Beverly Hills restaurant, Sullivan said.

Before landing at the Sullivan Restaurant Group, Kleinman was the chef at Indigo, which turned into Go Fish Grille. He also served two stints at Hilltop Cafe, which closed and reopened as Hilltop Bistro in Golden.

"Ian Kleinman is a first-class chef and he'll be sorely missed," said Sullivan, who had hoped to help Kleinman open his own place this year.

"When he realizes Beverly Hills isn't the best place to raise a family and live, we hope to see him back."

HOLLYWOOD HOTTIE: Ageless Remedies medical director and co-owner Herb Paris had no idea it was Eva Longoria when the *Desperate Housewives* star stepped into his Cherry Creek North spa on New Year's Eve.

In town with her beau, Tony Parker of the San Antonio Spurs, she shopped but didn't drop at Neiman Marcus in the Cherry Creek mall and at stores in Cherry Creek North.

"One of my aestheticians knew who she was," said Paris, one of the University of Denver's men's basketball team physicians.

"I know sports pretty well, so we were talking about the Spurs-Nuggets game that night."

Her assessment of the Nuggets chances to win that night?

"You guys can't finish games anyway," she told Paris. "We got a little chuckle out of that," he said.

She wasn't wrong: The Spurs beat the Nuggets 98-88.

THE SEEN: Nuggets star Carmelo Anthony and his pal posse cruising through Cherry Creek mall on New Year's Day.

EAVESDROPPING on a woman at DSW Shoe Warehouse in Belmar: "These are uncomfortable enough; they have to be formal."



David Zalubowski © AP
Desperate Housewives star Eva Longoria was at Saturday's Nuggets game with boyfriend Tony Parker, a guard for the San Antonio Spurs. Denver lost 98-88.

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About Penny Parker
After six years as a business writer at The Denver Post, Parker opted to cross Cofax and join the Rocky Mountain News as the On the Town columnist. Parker's background includes seven years as a feature writer at The (Everett) Herald, a Washington Post-owned newspaper in Washington state, and a short stint as managing editor for two weeks near Bellevue, Wa. As a feature writer, she won numerous awards, as well as a Society of Business Editors and Writers award for business writing. Parker is a California native and graduate of San Francisco State University.