

'Irasshaimase!' Welcome to Zen Sushi

By Whitney Helm Staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, September 22, 2015 4:00 pm

BELOIT — Irasshaimase.

That's what you hear immediately when walking into Zen Sushi inside the Phoenix Building in downtown Beloit. The word means "welcome" in Japanese and is used dually, to welcome customers and to alert staff of their arrival.

"Chefs are saying we have more customers, so let's prep some more fish or salad," said owner Brian Park.

This restaurant marks his 12th, and he is the only one in his family to venture into the business. He has operated restaurants in Milwaukee and Chicago. Admittedly, though filled with slightly larger than average two-person tables and hanging light fixtures, this restaurant is still getting its feet wet — only offering one-third of its nearly 200-item menu, which can be ordered a la carte or piece by piece.

The goal is perfection.

"We're practicing so everyone can get used to it," Park said. "Even though we know everything very well, we've still run into some problems with the food getting to the table before its cold."

Currently the menu is only sushi, shipped from Scotland to make both cooked and raw sushi dishes. There's even a "Rock River Roll" which features cucumber.

The most popular item is a "lunchbox" for \$8.95 with steamed rice, salad, Teriyaki Chicken or steamed vegetables. Additional rolls can be added for \$3, two rolls for \$10 which includes a soup and salad.

"I'm trying to do a quick meal that's not too expensive," Park said.



Sushi sampling

Whitney Helm/Beloit Daily News Owner Brian Park stands inside Zen Sushi, located in the Phoenix Building in Beloit. The restaurant is still in its soft opening phases, with a limited menu but Park hopes to have more than 200 menu items available in October.

Park observes and learns consumer patterns and adapts the menu to feature more "Beloit" taste preferences. When he saw customers using high-sodium soy sauce like ketchup, he simply changed the sauce by reducing the sodium.

"I want to be like Cheers," he said. "I want there to be a "Norm" here and I want to know my customers."

If it's repeat customers he wants, then he's found one in Jennifer Hanson, who had been to the restaurant twice in 24 hours.

"We go to Janesville once a week for sushi, we were excited," Hanson said.

Cassia Voysest, who was dining with Hanson, said she's driven past in hopes of grabbing some sushi since she's read about the restaurant opening in early July.

"I like the atmosphere, it's peaceful, and it almost feels like we're in a bigger city," Voysest said.

Voysest said she was a fan of the variety of greens offered in the salad, while Hanson said she liked the onion soup.

Retired Rock County Judge Ken Forbeck said he enjoyed the atmosphere.

"It's a very good place to be. The food is fine, the place is fantastic," Forbeck said.

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