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JANUARY 15, 2009

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Skipping town before Tuesday

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Obama's circle

Insiders who will fight for the new president



AP FILE



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PROFILE

Sweet(green) success

College pals turn idea for fast, healthful food into an area favorite

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Examiner

Nicolas Jammet and Nathaniel Ru. Call them the “Dynamic Duo” if you want — though in a few months with a partner returning from Manhattan they’ll need another moniker. What makes their story so remarkable is one of salad-bar success, probably beyond their wildest dreams. In fact, their Sweetgreen, a mecca in Georgetown for utterly delicious and a bit zany yogurt/salad creations, is going big time.

Not exactly metro-wide — though that may be on their drawing boards, and then, the world? — Sweetgreen will have a flagship eatery in Dupont Circle, adjacent to the Sunday farmers market. And the young men plan to open a third, smaller place in Bethesda, all within the next couple of months.

So, you say, that doesn’t sound like much. But consider this: These guys graduated from Georgetown University a little more than one year ago — in May 2007 to be exact — and they are only 23.

How did all this come about? They met as seniors in an entrepreneurship class at Georgetown, and also both lived just up the street.

“We got tired of all the local eateries. Washington is a perfect market for updated fast foods, based on sustainable and local produce,” says Jammet.

Besides, adds Ru, they thought they knew the market within a 2-mile radius of campus. Surprisingly, their customer base is not student-centric, as they had originally anticipated. Sweetgreen feeds a cross-section of locals, from business professionals to nearby residents — and, probably, those wistful suburbanites who hear of this fab place and trek in for a killer salad and Sweetgreen’s special frozen yogurt with toppings.

As far as running a food business, it also helps that Jammet grew up in the trade: His parents owned New York’s famed La Caravelle, and from an early age he worked the rounds at such destinations as Union Square Hospitality Group (Danny Meyer), B.R. Guest Restaurants (Steve Hanson), Batali & Bastianich Group (Joseph Bastianich), and his own family restaurant La Caravelle.

Besides, adds Jammet, “We are all big foodies, and that’s why we were inspired and also surprised that such a place was not operating in D.C., one of the most health-conscious cities.”

As they drew up plans to open, they encountered some resistance.

“A lot of people doubted us,”



College friends Nathaniel Ru, left, and Nicolas Jammet are the owners of Sweetgreen in Georgetown.



Sweetgreen’s “Sweetflow” yogurt is often served with an array of fruit and other assorted toppings.

IF YOU GO Sweetgreen

» Where: 3333 M St. NW
» Hours: 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Friday; noon to 8 p.m. Saturday-Sunday

says Ru, “and one of the contractors bidding on the project told us to quit.”

Undaunted, they selected the vacated Little Tavern building on Wisconsin, which is a historic site (Little Tavern was a chain of hamburger eateries in D.C. and Baltimore).

“We couldn’t do much to it,” says Ru. “We had a historian come by with pictures of all the Little Taverns in Washington. They were all the same.”

Of course, structuring the menu has played a big role in Sweetgreen’s success, and, says Jammet, they spent a lot of time developing it.

“When each item comes in season, it will be included,” he says, though they do have six standard salads, each carefully balanced for flavor and texture. And, you can make your own combos as well, or wrap it up.

And then there’s the yogurt.

“It’s frozen yogurt,” says Jammet. “It’s sweet Greek-style yogurt. We spent two weeks in a test kitchen making and sampling 100 batches.”

Best of all, it’s fat-free, and sweetened with fruit with minimal

Nicolas Jammet’s Bank Street Salad

Serves 4 to 6

- » 1/2 pound baby arugula, well-rinsed
- » 1/2 pound baby spinach
- » 1/2 cup sliced sun-dried tomatoes
- » 1/2 cup chopped walnuts or other tree nut
- » 1/2 cup crumbled goat cheese
- » 1 Tbsp. thinly sliced fresh basil leaves

Dressing Ingredients:

- » 6 Tbsp. champagne vinegar
- » 2 1/2 Tbsp. honey
- » 1 1/2 Tbsp. Dijon mustard
- » 1 tsp. dried thyme leaves, crushed with fingers
- » Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- » 10 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil

Assemble the salad ingredients in a large bowl and chill while you make the dressing.

For the dressing, whisk together vinegar, mustard, honey, thyme, salt and pepper until well mixed. Slowly whisk in the olive oil until you have an emulsified dressing. Drizzle atop salad and serve immediately.

sugar. And you can select several toppings to garnish your order.

A Green-Certified Restaurant by the Green Restaurant Association, Sweetgreens uses biodegradable everything, including the takeout menus made with plant seeds incorporated into the paper; if you plant them, they will sprout. And the flagship Sweetgreen should feel right at home at the Dupont Market, where, says Jammet, “I’ll get there as early as the farmers. We’ll buy fresh produce for the day, and one salad will be seasonal.”

For more with Nathaniel Ru and Nicholas Jammet, visit dceaminer.com.

THE VINE GAL

Sip, sip, hooray! It’s Inauguration Day!

By Cindy Greenberg

The nation’s capital is about to throw one of the biggest parties in the history of what can only be called a “party” town. Crowds will swell, resources will be stretched and history will be made as another incredible tradition of change will unfold before the world: A new president is sworn in.

The peaceful transition of power that occurs in this great country is remarkable. It instills optimism and shines as a symbol of freedom. Yes, change is good. It’s good for democracy and it’s good for the palate.

But if you’re planning on changing your palate at the inauguration site, think again. According to the official Web site, in a section labeled ‘Spectator Info,’ items prohibited at the event include alcohol and “sharp objects of any length” (i.e., no corkscrews). Clearly, wine lovers are out of luck if they were fortunate to snag a pair of coveted tickets to the swearing-in ceremony.

This is why come Tuesday, the Vine Guy and I will be heading over to a fellow wine lover’s home — bottle and corkscrew in hand — to celebrate the historic and highly anticipated event that has a majority of the population looking forward to a tidal wave of change. Best of all, our wine loving friend keeps the thermostat set at a comfortable level and will have plenty of cushy chairs to sink into to enjoy both the wine and the view of his big screen TV.

So, wine glasses in hand, we will embrace this historical era of political change by stepping off of the proverbial curb to toast our new president with a change in our wine habits. We plan to use this opportunity to explore previously uncharted wine territories and taste a variety of wines from many different countries, regions and producers. But it doesn’t have to stop at the swearing in. Make it your goal to bring change to friends and family this year. Consider hosting a wine tasting party with a dozen or so varietals on hand for your guests to sample then take a poll on the favorite of the evening. Who knows? Maybe change will win the popular vote.

So here is an eclectic assortment of wines for you to inaugurate your palate with. They represent a tasteful way to experience change while you bear witness to history on the big screen in the comfort of your home. Retail prices are approximate.

Non-Vintage Ewald Gruber “Punkt Genau” Sparkling Gruner Veltliner, Austria (\$20)

Now I know many people think that veltliner is so “yesterday,” but nothing says “bipartisan party” like a sparkling wine — and this beauty celebrates change in great

style. Filled with fine bubbles that carry aromas of peach and citrus notes on the nose, this sparkler is light and refreshing on the palate as well, where flavors of fresh apple, nectarine, guava and citrus integrate nicely with the abundant acidity to provide a refreshing finish. Serve well-chilled in a flute glass for a fun way to toast in the new administration.

2007 Bodegas Pazo de Tapas Alma de Blanco Godello, Monterrei, Spain (\$14)

If you have not heard of the Godello grape, you’re probably not alone. This Spanish varietal from the Galician coast produces an elegant white wine that features stone fruits and minerals on the fragrant nose. Notes of Key lime, peach and white nectarine shines on the mineral driven body, thanks to the abundant acidity. More citrus notes on the crisp finish make this a great wine to enjoy with shellfish or casual appetizers.

2006 Pinecrest Pinotage, South Africa (\$18)

Think pinot noir on steroids. This grape is a cross of pinot noir and cinsault and has become very popular in South Africa. This hearty version offers aromas of dark plum, smoky cedar and tobacco. Firm tannins hold up the flavor-packed palate where black cherry, plums and dark chocolate incorporate nicely with earthy undertones. A touch of mocha lingers on the medium-bodied finish.

2006 Pio Cesare Dolcetto D’Alba, Alba, Italy (\$22)

Many people think of dolcetto as a second-tier wine or a poor Italian relative of Nebbiolo and Barbera. But the right dolcetto — Italian for “little sweet one” — can yield rich results. This gem offers up a pretty bouquet of wild strawberries, raspberries and spice. The palate has fresh red-fruit driven flavors on a lithe frame with nice structure. Notes of blueberry and cinnamon add charm to the supple finish.



2006 Juanico Don Pascual Tannat Roble, Uruguay (\$20)

If you’re looking to stump and impress friends, try serving this lovely red wine from Uruguay — yes, Uruguay. The tannant grape is an old-world varietal, used in blending wines from the Basque region of France. Today, it is considered Uruguay’s national grape. I really enjoyed the supple flavors of dark cherry, cocoa and mint on the well-structured frame. Hints of pepper and spice support the medium finish and would pair well with lamb or venison.