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Push for Overtown revival renewed

BY OSCAR PEDRO MUSIBAY

Miami's long-blighted Overtown neighborhood may be set for a revival as six of its blocks, envisioned as prime sites for redevelopment, could be offered soon for competitive bid.

For years, the construction of new housing near the historic, newly renovated Lyric Theater

was viewed as a tool to spur new investment.

Once a thriving, albeit segregated, neighborhood fueled by jazz clubs, Overtown has been torn apart over the decades by the construction of Interstate 95 and neglect. That turned the neighborhood into a relative ghost town, home to some of the city's poorest residents.

In total, the city is targeting 5.5 blocks of devel-

opable land on both sides of Northwest Second Avenue between Sixth and 10th streets. The Lyric Theater is at 819 N.W. Second Ave.

But before any progress is made there, the city's redevelopment agency has to settle two lawsuits tied to claims from both the public and private

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Bankruptcy Judge Olson is dogged by controversy

BY PAUL BRINKMANN

U.S. Bankruptcy Judge John K. Olson has had a tumultuous 18 months, raising questions about whether he's a source of trouble or if he's a victim of bad luck.

Since April 2010, Olson has ordered two people arrested, ordered sanctions or sanction hearings on three attorneys, and resisted two recusal requests. A higher court also overturned his decision on a major case that involved some of Wall Street's top law firms.

All of that has occurred as Olson became engaged to and then married attorney Steven Fender in one of the first gay marriages of a federal judge.

Most bankruptcy attorneys in South Florida are reluctant to comment on a judge's performance because judges are crucial to their success or failure. But sources, who asked not to be named, said

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Working wonders with water

Restaurant entrepreneur grows concepts rapidly

BY SUSAN R. MILLER

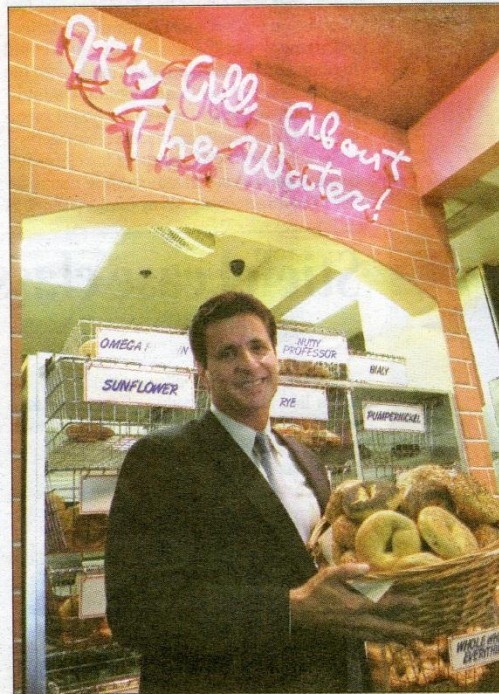
Steve Fassberg's Original Brooklyn Water Enterprises appears to have experienced a meteoric rise. But, like the rock star who spent years working local clubs before exploding onto the scene, his plans for growth have been in development for several years before coming to fruition.

It was barely two years ago that Fassberg opened his first Original Brooklyn Water Bagel Co. location in Delray Beach.

Today, he has five restaurants and eight more in various stages of development and construction. The 51-year-old New York native said he expects to open 18 by the end of the year.

But, bagels are just the tip of a growing empire that is being built around a single concept - "Brooklynized" water - a term Fassberg said he has trademarked.

He started making his bagels using a proprietary 14-step treatment



SUSAN R. MILLER

Original Brooklyn Water Enterprises' Steve Fassberg has five restaurants and eight more in development.

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BROOKLYN: Pizza, pasta and pretzel kiosks are under development

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process that takes out impurities and adds minerals. The pH levels are balanced to mimic New York City water.

"The reason we chose bagels first was because that was the low-hanging fruit," Fassberg said. "We have a lot of New Yorkers living here and in California."

In addition to bagel restaurants, Fassberg's Boca Raton-based company has pizza and pasta restaurants, and pretzel and ice kiosks under development. There's also bottled and flavored seltzer water, and a coffee-roasting facility being built next door to the Delray Beach restaurant that will provide freshly roasted coffee to its other restaurants.

A pizza and pasta restaurant prototype is targeted for an early 2012 opening in Palm Beach, with potential locations being negotiated. The pretzel and ice kiosks also are under development. The company eventually plans to franchise those concepts, as well.

The other businesses are "a natural evolution" of the company's growth, according to COO Scott Harris, who's also president of the franchise company.

"We focused on bagels at the point of the arrow," said Harris, who ran the OEM (original equipment manufacturer) organization at Fort Lauderdale-based Citrix Systems.

Harris said he was close to buying the development agent rights for Massage Envy in Florida, New York and Arizona when he met Fassberg.

"I let go of the Massage Envy gig and went with Steve," Harris said.

COMPANY SETTING UP A FINANCE ARM

Unlike many other franchises that do one thing well, "we have many things in our arsenal; and that's what's so great about this company," Harris said.

The company also recently set up a finance arm to help with franchise development. The franchise fee is \$30,000. Buildout costs range from \$295,000 to \$695,000 based on square footage, which ranges from 500 square feet



ORIGINAL BROOKLYN WATER ENTERPRISES

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for a kiosk to 5,000 square feet for a full-size restaurant.

"The money came from a group of investors who are going to fund equipment and development of stores," Fassberg said.

In March, former talk show host Larry King opened the company's first franchise location, a 3,700-square-foot bagel restaurant in Beverly Hills, Calif. His involvement has catapulted the company's name recognition.

"His lawyer tried to talk him out of it," Fassberg said. "But at the end of the day, he had a lot of faith in what we were doing, loved the product and took a leap of faith."

Earlier this month, Barbra Streisand had the Beverly Hills restaurant cater the wrap party marking the end of filming for her latest movie, "My Mother's Curse," which will come out next spring.

While star power is a big draw, Fassberg is banking on the people he's brought in to run

the operation to grow his company.

Joseph West, former dean of Florida International University's School of Hospitality and Tourist Management and co-founder of the South Beach Food and Wine Festival, was hired as director of operations.

The company, which now has 113 employees, recently hired a human resources director to keep up with growth. Between 25 and 30 employees are hired at every restaurant that opens.

Not everyone is enamored with the concept. International retail consultant Rick Segel asks: "What's the compelling reason to have me go there? What makes them so different? OK, so there are a bunch of people who once lived in Brooklyn who remember the water. Will that make me go past another bagel shop to go to this place?"

Segel, who has consulted for Microsoft Corp., Staples and Shell, and has written 14 books, isn't sold on the concept.

"One of my pet peeves is bagels and more, pasta and more - the world doesn't need more," he said. "There is a gimmick, and then there is a gimmick that is going to make me buy."

Gimmick or not, Fassberg said his concept

THE DETAILS

Original Brooklyn Water Enterprises has numerous companies under its corporate umbrella:

- Brooklyn Water Bagel Co.
- Brooklyn Water Bottling Co.
- Brooklyn Water Coffee Co.
- Brooklyn Water Pizza & Pasta Co.
- Brooklyn Water Pretzel and Ice Co.
- Brooklyn Water Finance Co.
- Brooklyn Water Blast Frozen Bagel Co.

Original Brooklyn Water Enterprises has several locations under development:

- **Boynton Beach:** opening in August
- **Hollywood, Fla., and Sepulveda, Calif.:** under construction
- **Jupiter:** construction to begin
- **Coral Gables, Lake Worth, Orlando:** negotiating leases
- **Georgia:** territory sold with 25 locations to be determined
- **Maryland:** Annapolis Harbor construction to begin in next 60 days
- **Culver City, Calif., and University of Southern California:** starting construction shortly
- **Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport:** working with hospitality company Delaware North to locate in a new food court space under development.

has been gaining acceptance here and in other countries.

He has close to 40 franchises sold, and said he has a developer in Hong Kong who is working with a franchisee to start with 14 units there.

"We have proven the acceptance of the product, the scalability and the profitability," Fassberg said. "Now it's about executing and the right strategic partners and the right people at the helm."

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