

Westword

Restaurateur Jesse Morreale Joins With Larimer Associates at Former Longo's Subway Tavern

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BY MARK ANTONATION



Longo's Tavern was transformed into Sunnyside Burgers, and will be transformed again.

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Update: Suspicions confirmed! Jesse Morreale will be launching his new venture in the space at 3759 Lipan Street that was once Longo's Subway Tavern, which Larimer Associates bought around the same time that Morreale's last venture, El Diablo, closed. "Honoring the historic significance of the location and what it meant to the neighborhood over time is important to me," Morreale says. "In keeping with the Subway Tavern's identity, the goal is to create an authentic and unpretentious hangout, serving up a healthy dose of nostalgia alongside elevated yet affordable comfort food and blue-collar cocktails, with twenty beers on tap." Here's our original story, posted on August 24:

Four years have passed since restaurateur Jesse Morreale exited Denver's dining and club scene with the closure of El Diablo in the summer of 2012 and Rockbar later that year. Disputes with the city over building safety and money distracted from the fact that we lost a great Mexican restaurant, just one in a string of hits for Morreale as front-of-house manager or owner — from [Mezcal](#) to La Rumba to Sketch — that helped define Denver's nightlife for more than a decade. But Morreale didn't disappear entirely; he was consulting on a handful of other projects around town and is now ready to launch his first new restaurant in years, a joint project with Larimer Associates/City Street Investors that will open in north Denver, on the edge of the Sunnyside and Highland neighborhoods.

Morreale isn't offering exact details regarding the address, concept or opening date of the project, since contractual specifics are still in the works, but he says it will be on one of the neighborhood's major traffic corridors. (We're betting on the former [TAG Burger Bar/Sunnyside Burger Bar location](#) at 3759 Lipan Street, since it's already in the Larimer Associates stable, though there are plenty of other possibilities.)

What he did share was that the new restaurant will be on a smaller scale than some of his previous efforts but that it will offer some of the same flair that we're used to from the hospitality pro's previous projects. Morreale notes that he grew up around his father's restaurants: "One thing my dad always said was, 'Restaurants are like theater,'" he explains. "'The way it looks, the way it smells, the way it sounds — they all play a role.'

"Anchor developments that have a lot of character can do a lot for a traffic corridor," he adds, pointing out that his vision was part of the success of what is now known as the Bluebird District on East Colfax Avenue.

Morreale says he's known Joe Vostrejs of Larimer Associates for more than a decade and that the two share a similar goal when it comes to developing restaurant and entertainment sites: "We appreciate one another's strengths in identifying things that other people can't put a pencil to and making it work — because that's good for the community."

Those strengths, he adds, include "hospitality workforce development...and working to make Denver bigger and better for the people working in the business."

So while we don't know whether the new joint venture will be a Mexican eatery in the vein of El Diablo and Tambien or something completely new, Vostrejs adds in a statement that it will be an "edgy concept... Jesse is the perfect partner to make this vision a reality."

The group expects to unveil the new spot in mid- to late September and will release additional details before the grand opening.