

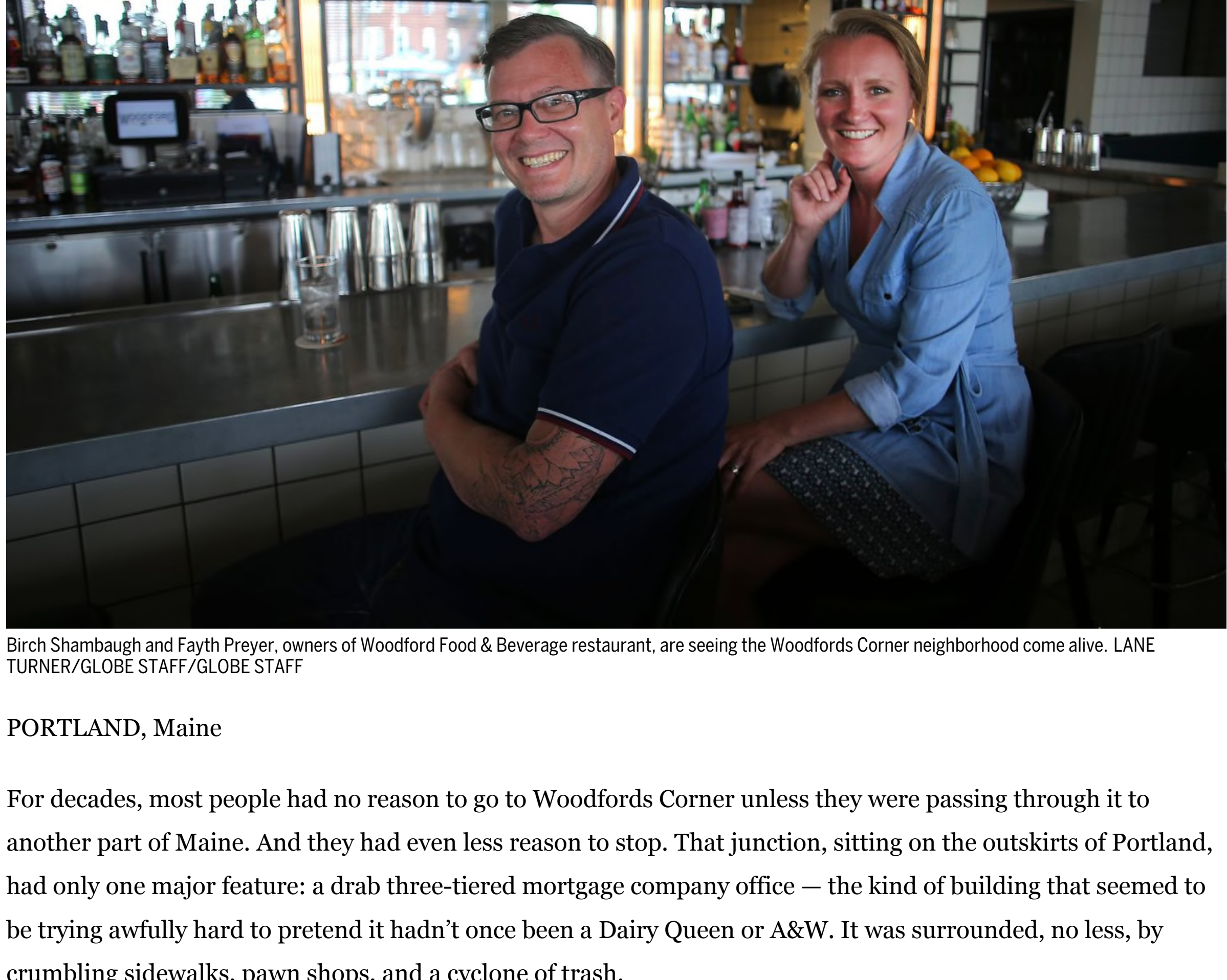
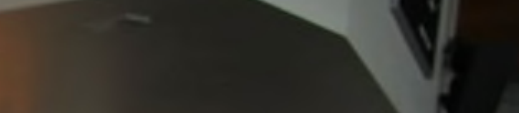
**BREAKING** FOUR MORE BODIES PULLED FROM RUBBLE IN MIAMI-AREA CONDO COLLAPSE, BRINGING DEATH TOLL TO 16

**20 questions to see if you can retire comfortably**

Take Retirement Quiz

# At the heart of Woodfords Corner's revival is this: 'You don't get very many opportunities in life to do what you really believe in'

By **Alexandra Hall** | Globe correspondent, June 26, 2018, 5:37 p.m.



Birch Shambaugh and Fayth Preyer, owners of Woodford Food & Beverage restaurant, are seeing the Woodfords Corner neighborhood come alive. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF/GLOBE STAFF

**PORTLAND, Maine**

For decades, most people had no reason to go to Woodfords Corner unless they were passing through it to another part of Maine. And they had even less reason to stop. That junction, sitting on the outskirts of Portland, had only one major feature: a drab three-tiered mortgage company office — the kind of building that seemed to be trying awfully hard to pretend it hadn't once been a Dairy Queen or A&W. It was surrounded, no less, by crumbling sidewalks, pawn shops, and a cyclone of trash.

And yet, when Fayth Preyer and Birch Shambaugh looked at that same building nine years ago, the married couple saw something else: a rare slice of midcentury modern, roadside diner-era history; and above all, a potential gathering point for the community.

Advertisement

"We fell silent looking at it," says Preyer, who had just moved with Shambaugh to Portland from Brooklyn. "It was falling apart, but we could see through that, and we knew it had to be a restaurant. It had huge windows, frontage on three sides, and was at the center of all this activity."

**Get The Big To-Do in your inbox**

Your guide to staying entertained, from live shows and outdoor fun to the newest in museums, movies, TV, books, dining, and more.

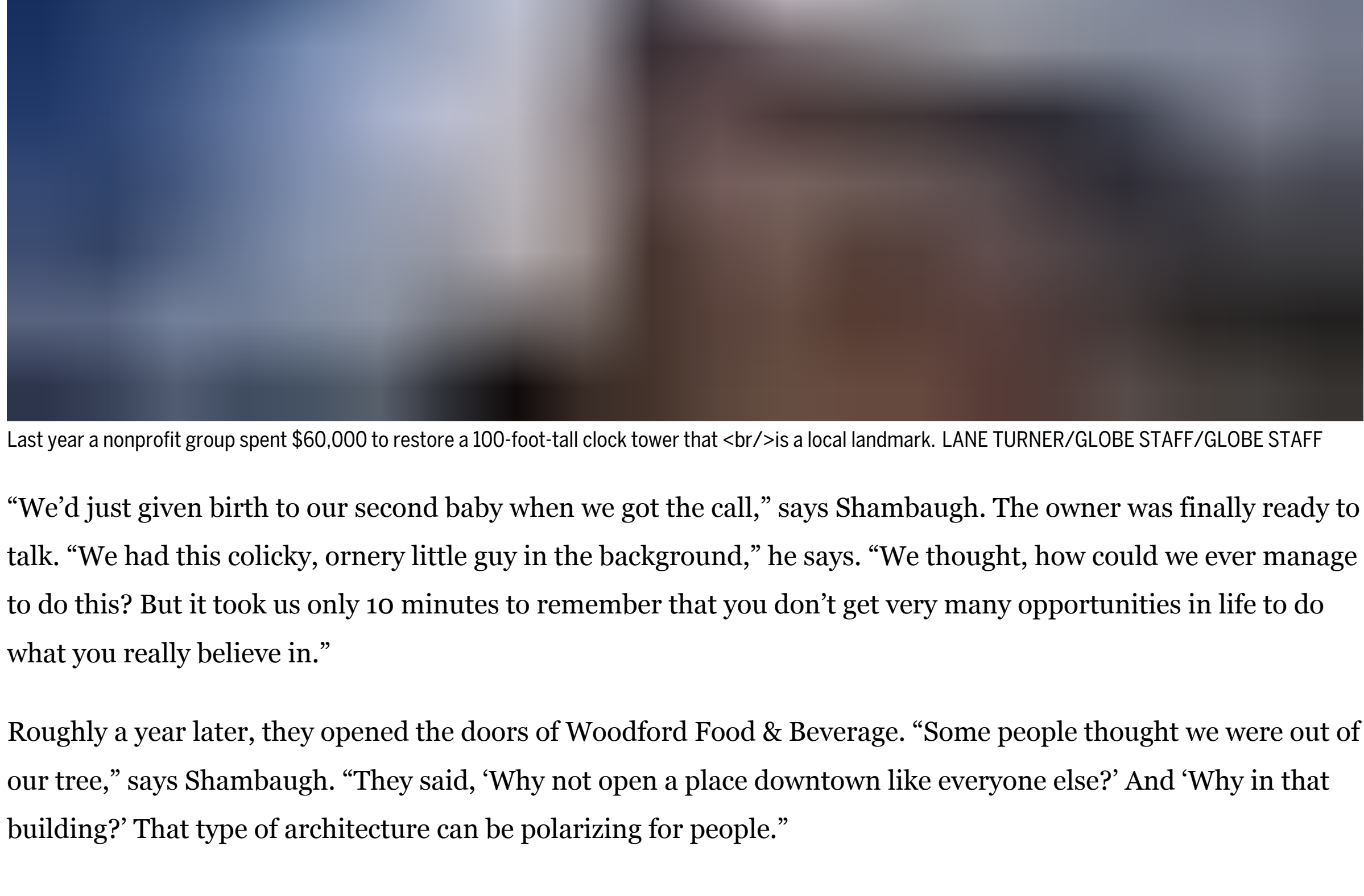
Enter Email

Maybe it was because they'd both always worked in the food world (in New York, she'd been at spots like Cafe Luxembourg; him at Home Restaurant). Or because they were, as Shambaugh describes it, "in mental transition mode." Having just bought a fixer-upper nearby, they were readying to start a family, and seeing the potential for change in everything. But instead of shaking off that first glance over the next few years, he says, they "started digging into a rabbit hole of research on the place" while working jobs and having their first child.

What they discovered: Nearly a century ago, Woodfords Corner had been a major hub of Portland — a thriving intersection of four neighborhoods (Back Cove, Oakdale, Deering Center, and Rosemont) — and its anchor was the building in question. Back then it had been the original Valle Steakhouse. Sitting across from a gleaming clocktower, it was the kind of place that area families used to ride a trolley to for lunch before doing errands in the abutting businesses.

Advertisement

The couple started thinking about how crowded downtown Portland's Old Port was becoming, what with tourists swarming its 70-plus restaurants nightly, and the need for an alternative to that crunch. Shambaugh started writing letters to the building's owner, letting him know again and again that the couple wanted to buy it, revive it as a restaurant, and try and get the neighborhood back on its feet.



Last year a nonprofit group spent \$60,000 to restore a 100-foot-tall clock tower that <br/>is a local landmark. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF/GLOBE STAFF

"We'd just given birth to our second baby when we got the call," says Shambaugh. The owner was finally ready to talk. "We had this colicky, ornery little guy in the background," he says. "We thought, how could we ever manage to do this? But it took us only 10 minutes to remember that you don't get very many opportunities in life to do what you really believe in."

Roughly a year later, they opened the doors of Woodford Food & Beverage. "Some people thought we were out of our tree," says Shambaugh. "They said, 'Why not open a place downtown like everyone else?' And 'Why in that building?' That type of architecture can be polarizing for people."

Preyer and Shambaugh, though, had doubled down on that aesthetic, coaxing out as much of the space's diner-like character as possible while mixing in modern, urbane flourishes. Instead of replacing the fir panels lining the three pointed ceilings, they restored them. When they ripped up the previous office's rundown carpeting and found old terrazo floors and trenches where Valle's Steakhouse's steam tables had once been, they polished it all up. Bubble light fixtures were brought in, as were huge slabs of zinc to do double duty as both lunch counter and a classic brasserie bar.

Advertisement

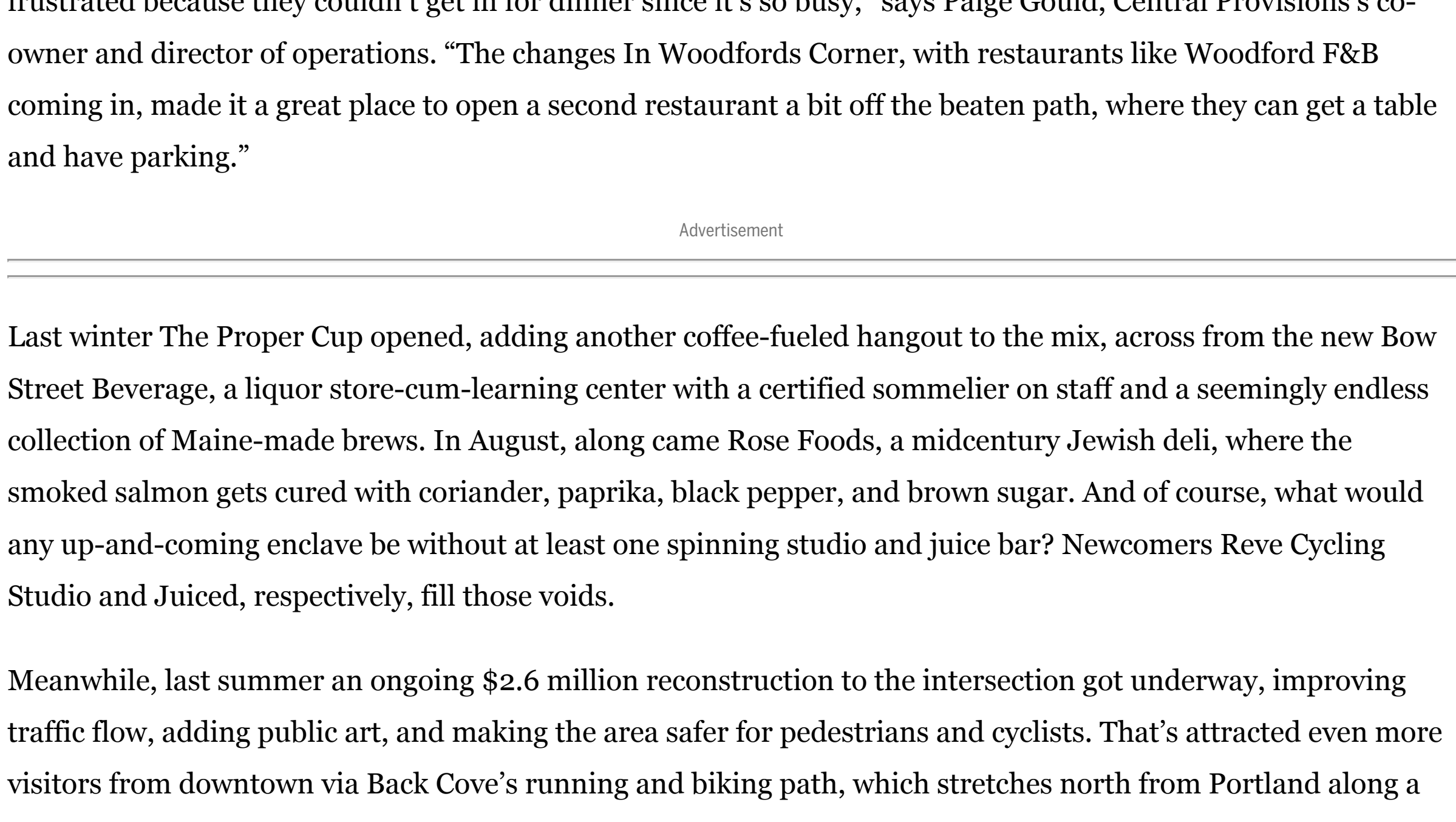
"The common denominator between American diners and French brasseries is that both are egalitarian, comfy spaces to be yourself in," says Shambaugh. "To hang out in and eat what makes you happy." In this case that meant the likes of feather-light cakes of local Jonah crabmeat, bound with artichoke, and jacked up with tangy celeriac slaw. A burger that deserves (and just about has) its own cult. Or big bowls of moules frites, the mussels straight from neighboring Bangs Island, cooked only in white wine, shallots, butter, and parsley.

"We're not looking to shock people with something they've never seen before," says executive chef Courtney Loreg, who came up in esteemed kitchens like Fore Street and Boston's erstwhile Hamersley's Bistro — kitchens prizing simplicity, where the art is in helping each ingredient shine. "We thought about the context of the space and building the same way we thought about the menu," she explains. "As contemporary revivals of familiar things. The goal is to keep the character, while adding new things we love."

Advertisement

What all that attention to detail has spurred in Woodfords Corner since the restaurant's opening two years ago has been remarkable. That an iconic eatery can fuel the vitality of a neighborhood is nothing new, but usually it's a meandering and lengthy process. What's happened here is more like a time lapse video.

"Having a spot this great for residents to spend time together changed everything," says Andrew Zarro, who moved to the neighborhood three years ago from Boston. "It was a huge leap for Fayth and Birch, but what they did with that place was a tipping point." In fact, seeing their success convinced Zarro to open Little Woodfords, the postage stamp-sized coffee shop, with his partner, T.J. Zarro. There, on the same block as the old clock tower, they dole out espressos and breakfast all day, and peddle one-of-a-kind local wares like hand-thrown ceramics.



Little Woodfords coffee shop. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF/GLOBE STAFF

A string of standalone, ground-level businesses has followed. Winter of 2017 saw an old tobacco shop replaced by Speedwell Projects, a nonprofit artist-run gallery with frequent exhibits. Two black box theaters have come along, adding to the regular performances put on by Portland Conservatory of Music, which operates out of Woodfords Congregational Church.

Last year Somali restaurant Mini Mogadishu joined fellow newcomers like Tipó — a neo-Italian spot from the team behind Old Port's James Beard Award nominee, Central Provisions. "Our regulars there were getting frustrated because they couldn't get in for dinner since it's so busy," says Paige Gould, Central Provisions's co-owner and director of operations. "The changes in Woodfords Corner, with restaurants like Woodford F&B coming in, made it a great place to open a second restaurant a bit off the beaten path, where they can get a table and have parking."

Advertisement

Last winter The Proper Cup opened, adding another coffee-fueled hangout to the mix, across from the new Bow Street Beverage, a liquor store-cum-learning center with a certified sommelier on staff and a seemingly endless smocked of Maine-cured brews. In August, along came Rose Foods, a midcentury Jewish deli, where the smoked salmon gets mixed with coriander, paprika, black pepper, and brown sugar. And of course, what would any up-and-coming enclave be without at least one spinning studio and juice bar? Newcomers Reve Cycling Studio and Juiced, respectively, fill those voids.

Meanwhile, last summer an ongoing \$2.6 million reconstruction to the intersection got underway, improving traffic flow, adding public art, and making the area safer for pedestrians and cyclists. That's attracted even more visitors from downtown via Back Cove's running and biking path, which stretches north from Portland along a pristine, egret-dotted stretch of Casco Bay.

That old clock tower, by the way, is now in working order; last year a nonprofit community service group spent \$60,000 to restore the 100-foot-tall landmark. "One night, it just lit up," says Shambaugh. He recalls the celebratory scene of astonished diners supping in Woodford F&B's forest green naugahyde booths, as they looked out to the whole neighborhood through the restaurant's gargantuan windows. "I remember the look on one regular's face saying, 'I haven't seen that clock working since I was a little kid,'" he says. "That didn't just happen because of us," he adds, "but we get to be a part of it."

Alexandra Hall can be reached at [alexandrahal@gmail.com](mailto:alexandrahal@gmail.com).



**MORE ON GLOBE.COM**

**Longtime director of Boston rape crisis center leaves amid a broiling controversy over racial equity**

The departure of Gina Scaramella comes after more than half of the nonprofit's staff sent the board a letter detailing what they said was the director's failure to "rise to the current challenge of addressing white supremacy."

**Gordon Ramsay is coming to the Back Bay**

Now that Americans are eating out in droves again, Ramsay is cooking up his US expansion.

**Video: Great White Shark feasts on seal 'close to shore' in Provincetown**

N.H.'s Sununu, the GOP's top Senate recruit for 2022, may have just started a big political problem over abortion

**Four more bodies pulled from rubble in Miami-area condo collapse, bringing death toll to 16**

A fire official has told families that four additional victims have been found dead in condo rubble; the death toll rises to 16.

**Gwen Berry, and the hammers thrown at Black womanhood**

Democracy depends on Black women, yet America does not see the humanity of Black girls and women.

**Graphic: What happened during the Winthrop shootings, turn by turn**

The vicious attack lasted less than 15 minutes from beginning to end. What happened?

**Task force calls for exam school admission changes, but gives in on exception for high-ranking students**

The changes finalized at a public meeting Tuesday night would place much more emphasis on a student's grades than test results, and would separate applicants into eight groups based on their socioeconomic status, so that a low-income child would not be competing with a wealthier student for the same seat.

**'It was mayhem': How a peaceful day in Winthrop became a matter of life and death**

Here's what happened Saturday, leading to two Black bystanders being gunned down and authorities investigating a hate crime.

**ANALYSIS: N.H.'s Sununu, the GOP's top Senate recruit for 2022, may have just created a big political problem over abortion**

In a little-noticed move on Friday, the Republican Party's top recruit to run for the US Senate next year — and possibly flip the balance of power in the chamber — may have committed a mistake that will likely dominate next year's election.

**ASK THE CARPENTER**

**Step-by-step instructions for removing window film**

**ASK ADDRESS...**

**What to do when tomato plants stop growing**

**NAMES**

**Joe Perry remains hospitalized after collapse**

**One intern's email mishap spurred a Twitter storm of support**

**For decades, Richard Bourdon's been shaping dough — and the way we view bread**

**STATES OF FARMING**

**Alongside a career in IT, Robert Chang forges a new life as a farmer, while advocating for farmers of color in Southern New England**

**SEASONAL RECIPE**

**Recipe: A buttery blueberry loaf is topped with a surprising lime glaze (it doesn't always have to be lemon)**

**DEVRA FIRST**

**Restaurant guide: Where to eat in Providence, R.I.**

**THE VIP LOUNGE**

**Charlie Gibson loves Africa, days at sea, and his home on the Cape**

**FOLLOW US**