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DOWNTOWN CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

Momona restaurant has just moved from Third street to new digs on Main street.
PHOTO BY
TINA FLYNN



Brady restaurants (the old-school bar in his former Bill's Towne Lounge spot, and a bakery/pizza place at Second and Broadway); plus the fairly recent additions of Gnarly Deli, Winchester Goose, Alter Ego Costume and D'Emilios Deli & Bakery; as well as the relocated Sicilian Cafe and The Roost, the reopened Tin Roof Bakery & Cafe, and the soon to reopen Lost on Main nightclub, and the sting of losing Om on the Range, Jamba Juice, Zot's Hot Dogs & Deli, Ellis Arts & Engineering, LaSalles, Lemonshark Poke, Kona's, Beach Hut Deli and Magnolia's downtown gift shop isn't so harsh.

"I think downtown is coming back," said Grayson Lobosky, fairly shouting over the clangs of basketball games behind him inside his new business, Coin Op Chico.

Lobosky grew up in Chico, attending Chico Junior and Chico High before leaving for 15 years, moving all over California and learning the restaurant and bar business along the way. Five years ago, he was lured back home to help La Salles re-open after an extensive remodel, after which he also helped open two more local businesses—Strong Water cocktail lounge and Burban Kitchen.

Before he started his own game room, Lobosky had tended bar at the Sacramento location of the small Coin Op chain (there are another three in the San Diego area). "First day I worked there I'm like, 'Oh my god, this would do so great in Chico,'" he said.

When he agreed to partner on a Chico version of Coin Op, he initially got to work converting a 5,000 square foot warehouse at Ninth and Cherry Streets. However, he said, when La Salles owners Nick Andrew and Kevin Riley approached him about selling their business, he jumped at the chance to go downtown. The old La Salles space was opened up to accommodate a ton of games—

pinball machines, old-school and new-school arcade games, and large carnival-style machines like Skee-Ball—with the intention of bringing something fun downtown for kids and adults (21-over kicks in at 7 p.m. on weekends, and 9 p.m. on weekdays during the summer; and will start a little earlier when school is in session).

"I grew up on East Fifth street," Lobosky said. "I rode my bike down[town] every day, and seeing the buildings start to fill up is awesome. It makes me happy."

Are parklets coming back?

Short answer: No.

After COVID-19 restrictions were in place, restaurants all over the world were given wide latitude to make changes that could help them feed people and stay open. One of the most visible was the installation of temporary parklets to allow for socially distanced outdoor dining, often at establishments that had no patio options pre-pandemic.

In Chico, the parklets were formed by taking over a handful of parking spaces in front of an establishment and arranging a protective border with concrete K-rail barriers. The allowing of parklets—and the loosening of outdoor alcohol restrictions by the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC)—was a lifeline for places like Duffy's Tavern, The Bear and The Banshee. And as early shelter-in-place restrictions were lifted, those who were jonesing for, and comfortable with, getting out with others were treated to an inviting, often energized downtown scene of outdoor dining and revelry.

At the end of 2022, as City of Chico's Local Emergency Order for the pandemic was due to be rescinded, so to was the permission for the parklets. Roughly \$300,000 of American Rescue Plan money was allo-