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SURFACING PHILADELPHIA

Neighborhood Wears Its Grit Well



Susana Raab For The New York Times

The Standard Tap sits at the nexus of the changing Northern Liberties neighborhood.

By JEFF SCHLEGEL

IN a past life, the humming factories, breweries and metal shops of Northern Liberties embodied blue-collar Philadelphia. Industrial decline was followed by an infusion of artists seeking cheap rents, and a trickle of restaurants and bars opened in their wake. Eventually, that trickle became a stream, and now this North Philly neighborhood symbolizes a city emerging from its post-Rust Belt slumber to become a go-to destination.

Stretching from near the Delaware River west to Sixth Street and from Spring Garden Street north to Girard Avenue, Northern Liberties isn't a place of Ye Olde ambiance. Its gritty urban aesthetic is part of its charm, and the influx of new condos is raising both its real estate prices and its profile.

"It was up and coming in the late-80's, but it never got over the hump," said Mark Bee, a third-generation plumber turned restaurant owner. "But things are definitely moving ahead."

He owns North Third, 801 North Third Street, (215) 413-3666, www.norththird.com, a restaurant decked out in bird and butterfly kites, quirky masks and local artwork. North Third's chef is Peter Dunmire, whose offerings include ethnic treats like potato pierogi (\$8.50), and fancier offerings like the pepper-and-thyme crusted tuna (\$19). All wines are under \$20 a bottle.

Second Street is the neighborhood's hub,



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and that hub's nexus is the Standard Tap, 901 North Second Street, (215) 238-0630, www.standardtap.com. This two-story taproom serves hearty pub fare, from chicken pie (\$11) to excellent burgers (\$8.50), with a variety of local brews. Its jukebox runs the gamut from The Cramps to The Ventures.

For a more upscale feel, Sovalo, 702 North Second Street, (215) 413-7770, is Northern Liberties' closest thing to white-tablecloth dining. Current menu items include butternut squash ravioli (\$14) and tender hanger steak with purple mashers (\$20).

The funkier interior on Second Street belongs to the Koi Restaurant and Bar, 604 North Second Street, (215) 413-1606, www.koibar.com, a sleek space painted koi orange and wasabi green. Tempura is the

specialty, with 20 à la carte items from squid (\$3 a piece) to sea urchin (\$5.50).

Honey's Sit 'n' Eat, 800 North Fourth Street, (215) 925-1150, is a homey breakfast and lunch place serving "Southern Jewish" goodies, like the five-inch-high brisket sandwich with collard greens and sweet potato chips (\$8.50).

Aside from the bar scene, there are interesting night life alternatives, including Ortlieb's Jazzhaus, 847 North Third Street, (215) 922-1035 and at www.ortliebsjazzhaus.com, where the jazz goes down every night until at least 1:30 a.m. in the former dining room of the defunct Ortlieb's brewery. Mickey Roker, Dizzy Gillespie's former drummer, performs regularly. A \$10 cover charge starts at 7:30 p.m.

There's a different vibe at the 700, a club at 700 North Second Street, (215) 413-3181. Locals knock back beers at the downstairs bar until 11 or so, when young hipsters flock to the house-party atmosphere in the former apartment upstairs where D.J.'s spin tunes from Britpop to hip-hop (no cover charge).

The art scene still thrives in Northern Liberties, but most artists work in private studios. Among the public galleries is the Ashley Gallery, 718 North Third Street, (215) 888-4813, www.ashleygallery.com, whose cutting-edge exhibits by local and national artists are open by appointment.

The Philadelphia Glass Works, 908A North Third Street, (215) 627-3655, www.phillyglassworks.com, sells exquisite objects made in house and elsewhere. ■