

CHICAGO JOURNAL

Volume 6, No. 13 ■ Thursday, January 12, 2006

The skinny on Clark and Polk gets mixed reviews

By MAX BROOKS
Staff Writer

Concord Homes would build 1,000 condos in three thin high-rises

Though the most vocal opponents of the Concord Homes plans for three thin high-rises at Clark and Polk made occasionally strident protests during an unveiling of the development at the Dearborn Park Advisory Council Jan. 4, the overall reaction from the neighborhood residents in attendance was mixed.

While Concord Homes had originally

called for a mix of town houses and towers that would have brought just fewer than 300 new units to the area, the new blueprints more than triple the size of the project by replacing the mix of buildings with three high-rises that will contain just more than 1,000 units and nearly as many parking spaces, according to Concord Homes attorney Bernie Citron.

"[The Department of Planning and Development] said they preferred more slender towers," Citron said, explaining that the design would minimize the impact of the new development on the views and light levels of those living across the street and residents in nearby Dearborn Park, just a block away.

He said a revised cost-benefit analysis

based on the current market and more stringent infrastructure demands on the site had forced Concord Homes to add more units to the site.

The towers, according to plans presented at the meeting, would be scattered across the site in checkerboard formation.

The first tower to be built would rise

30 stories above Polk near Clark over six levels of parking that would extend back toward the railroad tracks to the west. The second tower, also the development's tallest at well more than 300 feet, would rise 35 stories over four stories of parking at the eastern end of the lot. A final tower would come 32 stories from the ground at the corner of Clark and a new, one-block-long stretch of Ninth Street that Concord Homes will be required by the city to build, Citron said.

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Butter chef Ryan Poli takes a final look at a New Year's Eve dinner order before sending it out to the dining room.

Photo by Josh Hawkins

Blue-collar Butter

By MICHAEL NAGRANT
Contributing Writer

Ryan Poli skips the surrealism for solidly entertaining fare

Ryan Poli, chef of the West Loop's new hit restaurant, Butter, is exacting. On a recent afternoon visit to Butter, 130 S. Green, Poli was methodically dividing a loaf of bread into identical, quarter-inch slices for a broth that would later be made into buttered toast foam to accompany caviar. Poli could have chopped up the bread into random pieces, but by cutting the bread uniformly, he exposed the most surface area, increasing the flavor in the foam.

With that sort of eye for detail, combined with a lifelong student's

eye for infusing standard cooking methods with new techniques, Poli has quickly elevated himself into the culinary elite. Butter recently got a nod from Esquire as one of the 20 best new restaurants in America.

But don't confuse Poli with his Chicago contemporaries, like Alinea chef Grant Achatz and Moto Chef Homaru Cantu, who lately have made headlines with unconventional, surreal menus that stretch the imagination of their diners. Achatz, when he still worked at Trio, famously served a virtual shrimp cocktail, where din-

ers were given an atomizer and told to spray their tongue to taste shrimp, horseradish, and tomato-flavored air, while Moto offers "hanger steak with hanging potato chain links."

Poli, for his part, cooks with a lighter touch of whimsy than his counterparts, spotlighting dishes like guinea hen with bacon ice cream. He cooks his chicken sous vide, poaching it in a cryovac bag at a very low temperature, saying that produces a more tender cut of meat. But he insists that he doesn't employ newer cooking techniques simply for the

sake of being cutting edge.

"Chicago is more of the consumer of America, the working people of America," Poli says. "Let's be creative, but not crazy, let's give the people kind of what they want, and in our own way we will kind of turn them on to some newer things."

Poli, raised on the South Side as the son of a cop and a secretary, says he intends to stay grounded and true to his modest upbringing, when he was far from a foodie.

"I didn't grow up eating foie gras," Poli says. "We kind of grew up eating whatever my mom made. I grew up eating what was at the mall."

Similarly, Poli's first kitchen experience was hardly high cuisine. Poli

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Pilgrim Baptist burns

Historic New York synagogue could serve as model for restoration

By MAX BROOKS
Staff Writer

Some time in the afternoon of Friday, Jan. 6, roofers finishing a renovation of the Pilgrim Baptist Church, the historic Adler & Sullivan designed church at 3301 S. Indiana Ave., accidentally set fire to the wooden roof with a blow torch. Within an hour, the roof had burned away and the building had collapsed, according to Chicago Fire Department spokesman Larry Langford, but nearly 200 firemen continued to fight the blaze, dousing the building into the early morning hours. Later this week, restoration experts expressed optimism that the church could be successfully rebuilt.

At the time of the fire, though, optimism was in short supply, while searing descriptions of the blaze were easy to find. Joyce Sheppard, a congregant of the church, was working across the street at the Southview Manor nursing home, 3311 S. Indiana Ave., when the building caught fire.

"I got married in the church, my kids got married in the church, my kids go there, my

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Photo by Frank Pinc

Will Pilgrim Baptist Church recover from a four-alarm fire?