

Dead Lazlo's coffee pub

"If Death is becoming to you, you should be coming to us..."

Eddy Wylie / THE BATTALION

NEW NORTHGATE NIGHTSPOTS

Coffee and death provide unique Lazlo's vibe

By Jay Knium
THE BATTALION

After three months of hell, Dead Lazlo has finally been given life at Northgate.

Crammed into the small space left empty by the late Condom Station, Dead Lazlo's Coffee Pub has finally opened its doors — three months late, but better than never.

Dead Lazlo's is the brainchild of Aaron and Matt Brown, the owners and founders of Sweet Eugene's House of Java, a popular hang-out for cappuccino aficionados of College Station.

In order to reach a more-ready student crowd hungering for coffee and baklava, the brothers Brown teamed up with an old college buddy from California, Dave Atkinson. Running a coffeehouse was a dream of the three, and they now own two of them.

Atkinson said that chronic lack of funds and higher California start-up cost kept Eugene's from opening on the West Coast. So, the operation has moved to College Station, where both Aaron and Matt had attended Texas A&M.

Coffee lovers accustomed to the atmosphere of Sweet Eugene's are in for a different vibe from Lazlo's.

The motif for this place is, well, death.

Atkinson said the name for the place came from an episode of the "Laverne & Shirley" sitcom. In the show, the character Squiggy has an uncle named Lazlo who owns a restaurant called Lazlo's Place.

"Squiggy's uncle Lazlo died, and willed the restaurant to Squiggy and Lenny," Atkinson said. "They wanted to keep the name, but wanted to change it and honor him dying, so they changed it to Dead Lazlo's Place. We all thought that was kind of funny."

Thus, the whole vibe of Dead Lazlo's is dark, but without the depression.

"It's kind of taking a joking look at death — it's not serious by any means," Atkinson said.

Atkinson said the feel of this coffeehouse is rougher than Eugene's. Dark colors, concrete floors, ultraviolet lights, a couch imported directly from the Playboy Mansion and a giant, eight-ton concrete bar all make Lazlo's a unique Northgate hideout.

Possibly the most striking feature is the metal 1930s-era casket that serves the back of the place as a sort of "coffin-table," in Atkinson's words.

Atkinson said the coffin came from a former A&M student in Houston who owns a casting company. This man had a metal coffin from the '30s laying around, and was happy to donate.

At the moment, the casket is empty. But not for long.

"We haven't got a body for it yet, we're working on that," Atkinson said. "We're gonna get a mannequin, and dress him up in a tuxedo."

The crowning achievement will be the "corpse's" head, which will be a full-size model of the human head, cased in clear plastic so one can see all the gory details.

It was probably this slightly twisted sense of humor which got the Lazlo crew through the past few months. Faced with setbacks, construction delays, nonstop work and little sleep, the



Eddy Wylie / THE BATTALION

Dead Lazlo's is a new coffee house on Northgate.

raising of Lazlo was a grave matter, indeed.

Troy Brown, a Lazlo's employee, said the work was nothing but chaos. Brown listed such problems as dead-beat contractors that left the work hanging for three weeks, problems with constructing handicapped-accessible bathrooms, and virtual 24-hour work by the whole Lazlo's crew.

The Lazlo's staff agrees that the support from students and nearby Northgate businesses has been a big help.

"We've had probably 50 to 60 people a day stopping and asking us when we're finally gonna get open," Atkinson said. "Our answer is a running joke right now — 'Next week.' We've been saying that for two months."

Atkinson said that Northgate fits the mold for the Lazlo's vibe perfectly. He said the coffeehouse can become a haven for students who either aren't into bar-hopping, or for those who are into it a bit too much.

"I like the bars around here," Atkinson said.

son said. "But this is another place for people who don't drink, or who have been drinking and want to take some time to sober themselves up."

"Obviously coffee doesn't sober you up, but it can give them time away from it."

Atkinson said some visions of the Lazlo's motif got out of hand.

"Dave and I started getting a little carried away when we first started doing this, getting a little morbid," Troy Brown said.

Two of these "little morbid" ideas that were scrapped were regular obituary postings in the bathrooms, and a "Wall of Fame" depicting great deaths in history.

"We wanted to take a Barbie doll and torch it. After it was all burnt, we could put in on the wall and write 'Joan of Arc' under it. Also, a bloody glove on a plaque, which says 'Nicole Simpson,'" Brown said.

"We didn't want it turned into a haunted house, and that's kind of where it was going."



Amy Browning / THE BATTALION

Canyon dances into Northgate scene

By Michael Landauer
THE BATTALION

There was one motivating factor in Don Ganter's mind when he bought the Campus Theater in 1987.

"I bought the place out of sheer terror," he said.

Ganter, who also owns the Dixie Chicken and the Dry Bean Saloon, opened Northgate's first country dance hall two weeks ago. He said he was worried that someone might open a place that would compete with other Northgate bars.

But Ganter and his wife, Angela, both said that Shadow Canyon has actually brought business for the other bars.

"We hope to get the crowd that normally leaves the Chicken to go dancing just to come over here," Angela Ganter said.

The Ganters said they have gotten a positive response. Shadow Canyon has had a capacity crowd for three of the six nights that it has been open.

"So far, everybody's just loved it," Angela Ganter said. "The people like the balcony where they can go up and watch people dance below."

The interior of the club took eight months to finish and uses generous amounts of cedar to create a rustic atmosphere.

The building was built in 1939 and showed movies for 44 years. Angela Ganter said she remembers being a student when the theater, which showed pornographic movies in its later years, finally shut down in 1983.

The original stage is in place, but the floor has been leveled to make dancing easier. Everything from the high ceiling to the balcony and walls is covered in cedar.

There are two fully-stocked bars and, like the Chicken, customers who aren't dancing or playing pool are expected to sit and carve their names into tables while playing dominoes.

Sharla Vaughn, a senior education major, said she likes the new club and expects it to be successful at bringing more people to Northgate.

"It's kind of like transplanting the Dixie Chicken into a dance place," she said. "It's an entertainment spot. It's not just somewhere to go and sit. If you don't drink, it gives you something to do."

Vaughn, an Aggie Wrangler, said the music and the atmosphere make her feel at home.

"It's not your glitzy, sequin, smoke machine-type atmosphere," she said. "It's more a relaxed, home town, country-type place."

While the dance floor is not as large as those at other local dance clubs, Shadow

Canyon offers a different appeal. Ryan Cotten, a freshman environmental design major, said he likes not having to drive to Bryan just to dance.

"The atmosphere's different from all the other places," he said. "There's a closeness there."

With over 400 CDs and a \$20,000 sound system, Angela Ganter said Shadow Canyon is equipped to play whatever music is requested as loud as the crowd wants it. They play a mix of old and new country as well as some rock'n' roll, but she said they always stick to danceable music.

The Ganters said they hope to bring a few big-name performers to Shadow Canyon's stage in the fall. For now, they are counting on their location and word-of-mouth advertising to keep the dance floor full.

Don Ganter said having a dance place on Northgate keeps people from driving across town to go dancing after hours of drinking at the Chicken. It also makes it possible for northside residents to walk to a dance hall.

"It's shorter to get to the Canyon than it is to get to their vehicle," he said.

Although his initial investment was a defensive move by Don Ganter, he said he is happy with how it turned out.

"I'm really glad I bought it," he said. "It's turned out really beautiful inside. If it'll do what it's done in the last six days, I'll be very happy."



Amy Browning / THE BATTALION

The interior of Shadow Canyon.