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What's up, Doc?

Dave Magrogan bottom lines it

When you're trying to take your restaurant empire from zero to 25 in seven years, you have to make some bold moves. So it shouldn't be a surprise that Dave Magrogan, the West Chester-based publican behind Kildare's and Doc Magrogan's Oyster House has—alongside many steps forward—taken a few steps back. Magrogan, the chiropractor turned restaurant genius and motivational speaker, long boasted of plans to own 25 restaurants by 2010 grossing \$75 million annually; and so far he has four Kildare's—West Chester, King of Prussia, Manayunk and University of Delaware, with three more on the way this year at University of North Carolina, Notre Dame, and University of Scranton. There are also two Doc Magrogan's, at West Chester and Dover Downs, with a third due at Notre Dame. But he's also had to revise his plans, selling off Kildare's Headhouse Square address, closing a location in northeastern Pa., and selling Grady David's, the organic "casual fresh American" concept he launched in West Chester in 2007. But now, with a new chief operating officer direct from Hard Rock Café and a warehouse full of "genuine Irish" artifacts, Magrogan feels ready to take his Irish empire to chain stardom. He spoke with MAINLINE about growing his business in a down economy and what it is to be a rhino.

What's with all the changes at Kildare's?

We've found the environment that Kildare's performs best in is really the downtown college towns. For the past two years, we had tried to take Kildare's from a college town and put it next to a P.F. Chang's, in these lifestyle centers—and the model didn't work. That's not what Kildare's is. I was trying to have Kildare's outgrow its college beginnings and in actual fact that college market is where it does the best.

What happened at the Headhouse location?

Headhouse Square was missing the young professional and college component. It wasn't the central hub for any real youth market. South Street is not what it used to be. The problem was, for what it took at the corporate level to manage it, there was no strong return on investment. An owner-operator location there could make a decent dollar, but it was never going to do \$3 million a year, which is the number we target.

What's up with the rhino talk?

We're about to launch a Web site, rhinoliving.com, with daily motivational emails and rhino training. And my speaking business has grown quite a bit in the past year; I'm flying all over the country to speak about motivation, using the analogy of a rhinoceros and a cow. [Essentially, the thick-skinned rhino charges through problems, while the cow only complains.] And I hope to have my first book done by the end of the year. It will be about motivation and staying positive in negative times, which I think is very fitting for these times.

My, oh, Maia

What happened to the Main Line's most hotly anticipated restaurant?

When Maia opened last summer, it was supposed to be the best thing to happen to Villanova since Jay Wright. MAINLINE, for one, had a phenomenal early meal there—and gave it a glowing review to prove it. But since then, we've heard, frankly, a whole lot of complaints about the restaurant that was supposed to alter Main Line dining forever.

And it's not just us. After Chef Terence Feury left to helm the kitchen at Fork in Old City, and sommelier Melissa Monosoff departed for Savona in Gulph Mills, the *Inquirer's* Craig Laban even knocked a bell off his initial jubilant three-bell review. Maia, he wrote, was "heading in the wrong direction fast."

We asked current chef Patrick Feury what he's doing about it. For starters, he says, Maia has trimmed upstairs dinner service to Thursday, Friday and Saturday and revised the prices. Now an average entree is priced in the mid \$20s instead of \$30-plus.

Michael Wei, who owns Yang-Ming in Bryn Mawr and is a part-owner of Maia, says the economy just plain couldn't sustain Maia as it was. Terence, who ran the kitchen at Maia's gourmet restaurant, "is a great chef, and he prepares food that's very time consuming, and that's why we had to charge such a high price. But the economy can't support that style of cooking now," Wei says.

Patrick Feury has added more comfort food on the menu all day, including chicken pot pie and grilled pork chops. And more changes are in store, he says: "We opened the place before the crash in the stock market. Now, we want to change things, to give people more options, to take the pressure off, because the way we go out has changed."

Change we can believe in? We hope so.