

A SLICE OF FOXBORO THRIVES IN FLA. SUN; [All Editions]

Jennifer Berkshire. **Boston Herald**. Boston, Mass.: Mar 20, 2005. pg. 003

Abstract (Document Summary)

This wicked awesome idea is the brainchild of Thom and Rob Popoli, brothers who got their start in Leominster, moved to southwest Florida as teenagers but never lost their affection for New England. "We wanted a name that anyone from New England would immediately recognize," explains Thom Popoli.

The secret to their success: a bar and restaurant that looks and feels like it belongs in Massachusetts. In addition to banners and logos of seemingly every New England sports team (some of which have been donated by patrons), the menu also bears the stamp of Boston. Hungry diners can tuck into Foxboro tailgate chili, New England lobster rolls and clam chowder made the way Mother Popoli still makes it.

Full Text (476 words)

Copyright Boston Herald Library Mar 20, 2005

NAPLES, Fla. - As if you needed another reason to move to Florida.

New Englanders who've been holding out on heading south because they're worried they'll actually miss us can breathe easy. Southwest Florida now boasts a place that any self-proclaimed "Masshole" would be proud to call home.

Welcome to the Foxboro Sports Tavern, a tribute to all things New England, where Sam Adams is on tap, Fenway Franks are on the menu and your waitress probably doesn't pronounce her "R's" either.

This wicked awesome idea is the brainchild of Thom and Rob Popoli, brothers who got their start in Leominster, moved to southwest Florida as teenagers but never lost their affection for New England. "We wanted a name that anyone from New England would immediately recognize," explains Thom Popoli.

And recognize they have. Since the Foxboro Sports Tavern opened in October 2003, the business has taken off, thanks to a combination of New England's wild ride to the top of the professional-sports heap and a huge population of "snowbirds" - Northerners who flee the cold winters but never stop hankering for home. "We've had an incredible 18 months," says Thom Popoli.

Not bad for a venture that the brothers largely built themselves (Rob Popoli was a former manager at a Home Depot), and financed by mortgaging their homes. "People told us, 'You boys are nuts,'" Thom Popoli said, "but we approached it with kind of a Texas Hold 'Em strategy: We're all in."

The secret to their success: a bar and restaurant that looks and feels like it belongs in Massachusetts. In addition to banners and logos of seemingly every New England sports team (some of which have been donated by patrons), the menu also bears the stamp of Boston. Hungry diners can tuck into Foxboro tailgate chili, New England lobster rolls and clam chowder made the way Mother Popoli still makes it.

And on the weekends, people pack the place for old-fashioned fish fries featuring - what else? - cod.

But if the Popolis' venture taps deep into the nostalgia that the snowbirds feel for home, the brothers also are trying to introduce a new generation to the joys of the region and its sports teams. During this year's Super Bowl celebration, for example, the tavern's staff of 60 re-created snow flurries for the Pats' Florida fans, using tens of thousands of napkins.

Now the brothers are hoping to expand their venture to other parts of Florida, or anywhere refugees from the endless New England winter congregate. "This is a concept that would work wherever you have a lot of retirees," says Thom Popoli. "Our dream is that someone will hear about what we're doing and help us expand."

Caption: NATIVE SON: Thom Popoli serves up some of his New England-style samplings at his bar in Naples, Fla. Staff photo by Matt Stone

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

People: Popoli, Thom
Companies: Foxboro Sports Tavern
Section: *NEWS*
ISSN/ISBN: 07385854
Text Word Count 476
Document URL: