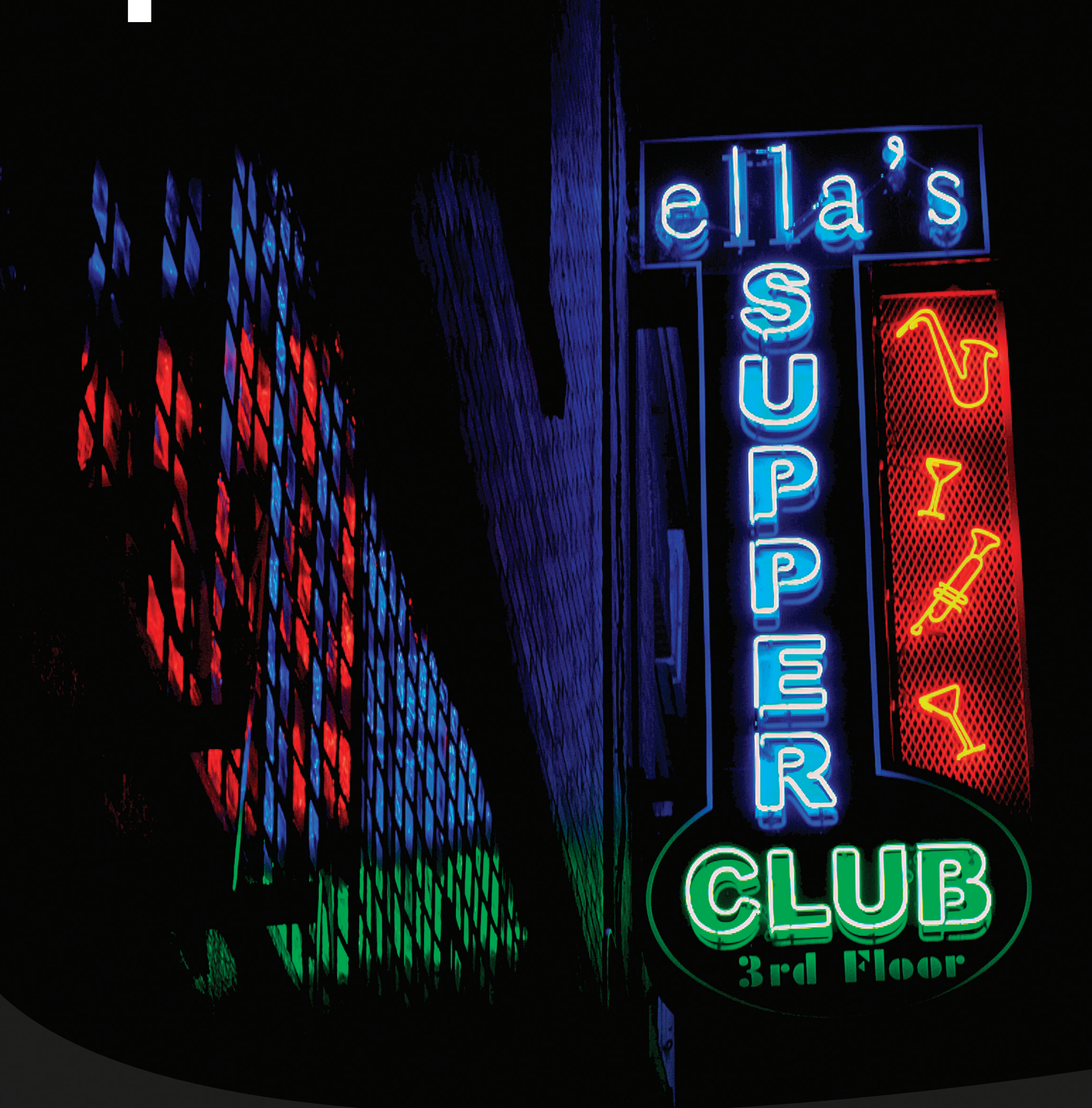


spokurban

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DOWNTOWN SPOKANE MAGAZINE



Downtown's New Nightlife ■
Building Goes Green ■ The Innovation Zone

downtown's

NEW NIGHTLIFE

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY John D. Moore

Downtown Spokane, which had been known to fall asleep when the sun set, is now staying awake into the wee hours, and doesn't seem likely to resume its slumber anytime soon.



Downtown livens up each each night.

In recent years, new restaurants and bars, spurred on by development activity in the city's core, have been changing the landscape of the after-hours scene downtown. New hotels, condominiums, and entertainment venues have lent a cleaner, safer, and more upscale image to the area, which creates an environment where nightlife can thrive, downtown business representatives say.

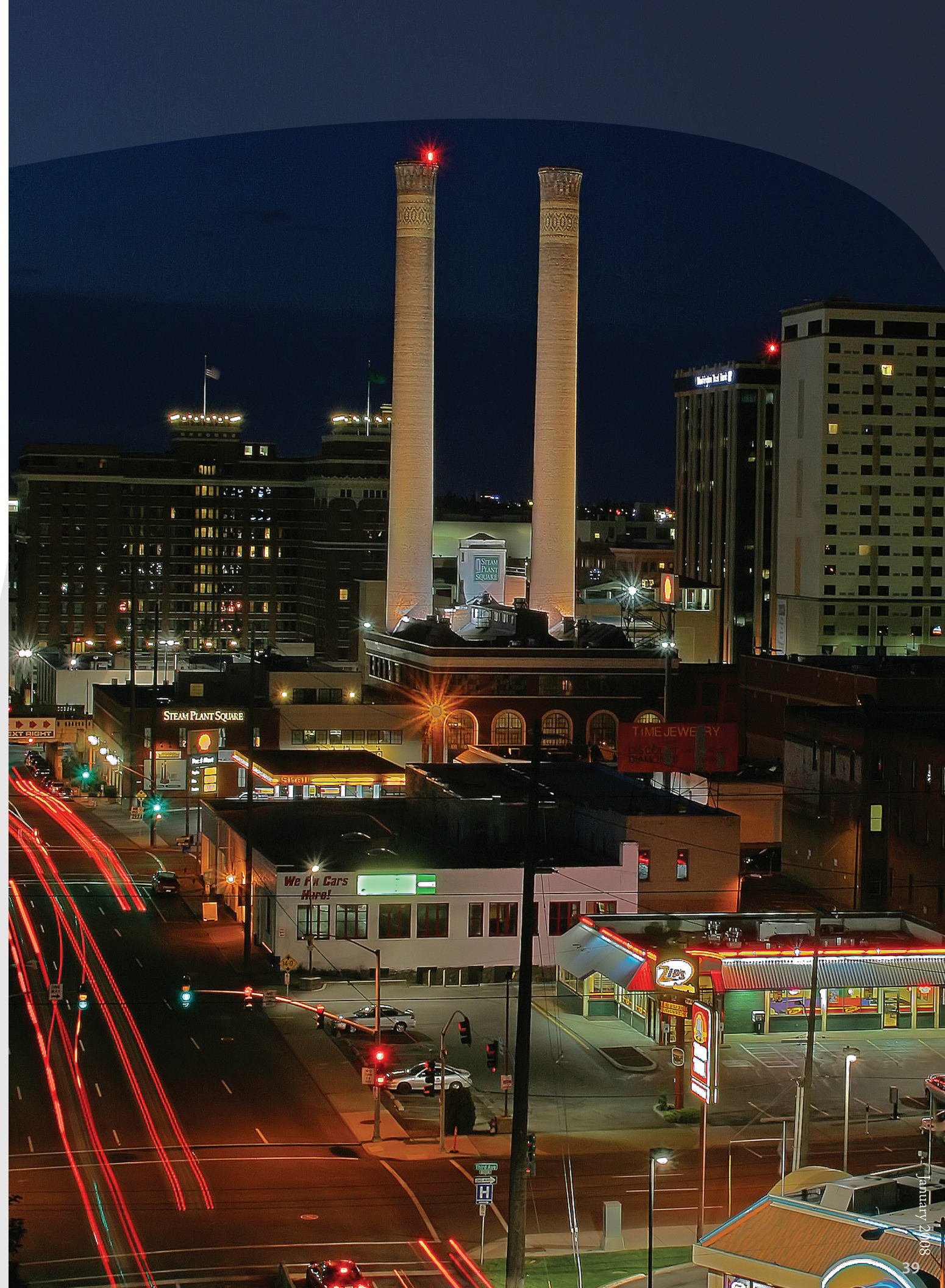
"Five years ago, downtown rolled up at five o'clock," says Marty Dickinson, president of the nonprofit downtown Spokane Partnership. "Now, on any given night of the week, the streets are lively, and people are eating dinner, going out for martinis, listening to bands, and going to art galleries."

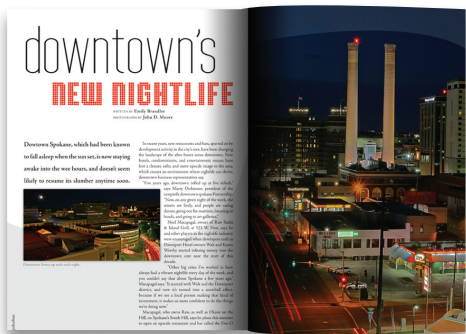
Noel Macapagal, owner of Raw Sushi & Island Grill, at 523 W. First, says he and other players in the nightlife industry were encouraged when developers such as Davenport Hotel owners Walt and Karen Worthy started infusing money into the downtown core near the start of this decade.

"Other big cities I've worked in have always had a vibrant nightlife every day of the week, and you couldn't say that about Spokane a few years ago," Macapagal says. "It started with Walt and the Davenport district, and now it's turned into a snowball effect, because if we see a local person making that kind of investment, it makes us more confident to do the things we're doing now."

Macapagal, who owns Raw, as well as Okane on the Hill, on Spokane's South Hill, says he plans this summer to open an upscale restaurant and bar called the Five-O

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food created by guest chefs, he says. He estimates it will employ about 40 people, which would give his company a total of about 200 employees, he says.

Macapagal says he's been eyeing the east end of downtown for several years, and believes it will be the site of much more development in the near future.

"The east side is an excellent opportunity because of the Division Street corridor and the convention center expansion," he says. "These are properties that were sitting vacant for four years or more, and now, all of a sudden, there's a lot more interest in them."

Eric Nagano, a principal at Cuisine Northwest LLC, which operates the Bluefish restaurant and bar downtown, at 830 W. Sprague, agrees that nightlife activity is heading east.

"There's not much more left to develop on the west end," he says. "People are creating venues to continue the flow to the east, and it's going to put another little pocket of entertainment and restaurant and beverage activity into the downtown."

Dickinson says the growing U-District east of downtown also is contributing to the nightlife activity there, and the advent of River Park Square eight years ago undergirded the entire downtown. Several restaurants and bars have opened on the east end in the past two years, including Prago Argentine Café, at 201 W. Riverside; the Lion's Lair, at 205 W. Riverside; and Isabella's Restaurant & Gin Joint, at 21 W. Main.

Other nightlife spots that have opened or expanded downtown within the past three years or so include: The Safari Room Fresh Grill & Bar at the Davenport Tower, at 111 S. Post; P.F. Chang's Bistro, at 801 W. Main; Jimmy'Z Fine Food, Spirits, & Cigar Lounge, at 521 W.

Lounge at 22 W. Main. The restaurant will serve European and Asian fusion food, as well as feature two private rooms that will serve a rotating mix of

Sprague; Twigs Bistro & Martini Bar, at 808 W. Main; Steelhead Bar & Grille, at 218 N. Howard; Wild Sage American Bistro, at 916 W. Second; Brooklyn Nights, at 122 S. Monroe; Bistango Martini Lounge, at 108 N. Post; Trick Shot Dixie Outlaw Saloon & BBQ, at 321 W. Sprague; and Ella's Supper Club, at 1017 W. First.

Meanwhile, Cuisine Northwest LLC plans to open a restaurant soon in the space formerly occupied by Ankeny's Rooftop Restaurant on the top floor of the Ridpath Hotel. The company already has opened the Artisan Room on the Ridpath's ground floor, Nagano says.

Nagano, who moved here five years ago, says he's watched as the downtown core has transitioned into a hip locale from a place that his relatives in Spokane Valley didn't want to visit because they were afraid to walk on the streets at night.

"People avoided it because of parking issues and vagrants," he says. "Now, it's become a destination, and you can see people hopping from one place to the next."

Nagano attributes the change to a number of factors, including entertainment venues that have opened or been remodeled, such as the Spokane Convention Center's Group Health Exhibit Hall, the Big Easy Concert House, and in the future, the refurbished Fox Theater. In addition, the city has helped clean up the area with projects such as the Post Street enhancements and by stepping up its law enforcement efforts, he says.

Reema Shaver, owner of the Bistango Martini Lounge, says she opened her swanky-looking establishment because she saw a need for an upscale bar downtown, and thought the time was right given the activity going on there.

"People were so anxious to have an upscale, quality, safe bar to go to, and the success we've had shows that Spokane's citizens will frequent nice places and are willing to pay money for nice places," Shaver says.

Shaver says local residents have been visiting downtown more often, but customers also come from outside the

Spokane area, making the city's core a regional nightlife hot spot.

"People aren't having to go to bigger cities like Seattle, because it's all here now," she asserts. "They're realizing what a gem Spokane really is."

Dickinson says one of the goals included in the downtown Spokane Development Plan, which the city of Spokane enacted in 1999, was to make the area more of a destination and to "extend the hours of downtown life."

"We said, 'Let's just get them to come down here and choose what they want when they get there,'" Dickinson says.

Part of what has helped draw a variety of people to downtown has been the broad mix of businesses that have opened, many of them locally owned, she says. In addition, many of the restaurants that have opened recently, as well as some that have been here awhile, now operate extended hours to keep the party going later into the night, she says.

"It gives downtown a cool, authentic feel to it when nothing is cookie cutter," she says. "When you look at Seattle or Portland, they have bones like this, an eclectic mix that shows Spokane has what it takes to make it a 24-hour downtown."

Condo projects that have been springing up also have spurred commercial activity and a consistent stream of customers to those businesses, Dickinson adds.

Nagano, Macapagal, and Shaver say the rising number of people who are living downtown has helped lend stability to the nightlife industry. Macapagal cautions, though, that unless people live fulltime in those condos, rather than just view them as an investment, the units won't continue to contribute as heavily to urban growth and vitality in the future.

"The softening condo market is a challenge," Nagano says, "but as we increase the infrastructure downtown with things like a grocery store, then urban living is going to be an exciting thing."

Nagano expects the restaurant and bar industry to approach a saturation point soon, but says demand will increase again once condos fill up and the planned Kendall Yards mixed-use development moves ahead. "There's so many people in the region that we can draw into the downtown core to support all of this," he says. "Nobody is really falling by the wayside yet. ◀

THE HOT SPOTS

- **Big Easy Concert House**
919 W Sprague • (509) BIG-EASY
NW's premier concert house & night club featuring top national performers.
- **Ella's Supper Club**
1017 W 1st Ave • (509) 747-8243
Total entertainment in cabaret, dinner theater style. A weekend night must!
- **Mizuna's Wine Bar**
214 N Howard St • (509) 747-2004
Wine tastings, full bar, signature drinks, summer outside patio.
- **The Bing Crosby Theater**
901 W Sprague Ave • (509) 227-7638
Elegantly restored Neo-Classical theater featuring concerts, music and more.
- **Europa Restaurant & Pub**
123 S Wall St • (509) 455-4051
Freshly made pastas, pastries and bread in a cozy European setting.
- **Safari Room Fresh Grill & Bar**
111 South Post St • (509) 455-8888
An adventure in fine dining in the heart of Spokane.
- **Wild Sage Bistro**
916 W 2nd Ave • (509) 456-7575
Contemporary American cuisine in an inviting bistro atmosphere. The place to celebrate life with friends.
- **Clinkerdagger**
621 Mallon Ave • (509) 328-5965
Clinkerdaggers is a landmark restaurant right on the banks of the Spokane River.