

## Couple to open Irish pub in Lilac City

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ROCHESTER — At the start of the auction, a married couple from Somersworth who hoped to open a family Irish pub sat off to the side of the room.

A half-hour — and \$225,000 bid — later, they were signing bank papers, meeting businessmen, city representatives and being offered building insurance.

Life changed quickly for Walter and Melanie Belville on Wednesday after beating out six or seven other bidders for space at 50 North Main St.

The property, the former home of Big Head's Bar and Grill and Vathally's Sub and Pizza, was foreclosed on by Federal Savings Bank.

The bidding started at \$50,000 and quickly jumped to \$150,000, but it took some time for interested parties to get over the \$200,000 mark.

Bill Sawyer, vice president of Federal Savings Bank, said he was pleased with the outcome. "If I wasn't, my card would have gone up," he said.

The Belvilles are hoping to open "Mel Flanagan's Irish Pub" around early June. They plan to split the street-level space of the 4,500 square-foot area into the pub and cafe called "Coffee, Tea and Chit Chat."

They're no strangers to the business. They operated a Jimmy Jones Locker in downtown Dover in the 1980s and then ran Mel's Drive-in in Somersworth up until 2005, when Walter, a former pipe fitter, became so ill doctors weren't sure he would live. He's since recovered and, observers noted, held a strong poker face during the auction.

The Belvilles said they want to bring a taste of Ireland to downtown Rochester, which they're confident is becoming a destination. Their new spot is sandwiched between an art gallery and karate school, and just a few paces from a few restaurants and bars.

Patrons can expect Mel-made Guinness beef and lamb stews, soups with brown bread and plenty of pastries — and a place where parents can spend time waiting for children to finish dance or gymnastics



Krauss/Democratic photo Melanie and Walter Belville, the prospective owners of Mel Flanagan's Irish Pub.

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lessons, or lawyers and others with business at the courthouse can take a break.

Walter and Melanie also plan to use the backroom for meetings, and renovations to inside are expected to start soon.

They're not necessarily looking to cater to the after-dark or sports-crazed crowd.

"There will be one TV. We want people to be able to come in and watch the game without having to scream across the table," Walter said.

There are always exceptions, he said.

"The last game of the World Series? Yeah, it might get a little loud."

Melanie, a cook, said they hope their business attracts others to downtown.

"We invite everyone in the community to come in and talk to us and tell us what they like," she said.