

The Business

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The Big Empty Tent

Days before Art Chicago was set to open, Thomas Blackman ran out of money.

By Deanna Isaacs

Last Friday, six days before Art Chicago was due to open at Butler Field, director Thomas Blackman placed an urgent call to local business phenom and Kendall College president Howard Tullman. The fair was set to host more than 100 galleries, two-thirds of them from out of town, with dealers from Europe, South America, and Asia starting to arrive over the weekend. Local gallerists, yearning for Chicago to reestablish itself as the art-market hot spot it was 15 or 20 years ago, were touting the event, committing themselves to it, crossing their fingers and praying it would be a turning point. But now, with the empty shell of a 25,000-square-foot tent erected in the park just east of the Art Institute, preparations for the fair had come to a halt. Blackman was out of money, unable to pay union laborers to install the floor, electricity, plumbing, and walls in the tent's interior, and the union, testy because nonunion labor had been used to get the tent up, had walked off the job. Blackman told Tullman a loan he'd been counting on had failed to come through, and he needed \$250,000 to bridge the gap.

Tullman says he met with Blackman Saturday and agreed to loan him the money, but was later told Blackman's calls to the union and contractors hadn't been returned. (A union spokesman says representatives met with Blackman Saturday night and "he didn't want to come to an agreement.") "By Monday it was pretty clear time had run out," Tullman says. "He wasn't going to be able to get it done."

At that point SOFA producer Mark Lyman, who'd been a contender to do the Pier fair last year, and his employer, UK-based DMG World Media, began talking about moving the show to Navy Pier. DMG executive vice president Mark Carr says Blackman had approached them on Thursday and asked for a loan: "It was clear he needed it to open the fair. We said we'd look into it and try to do it for him. We then got lawyers to do their due diligence. After they did, we decided we couldn't go ahead." Carr says they informed Blackman there'd be no loan on Friday afternoon.

By Monday, however, DMG was considering stepping up if Blackman, along with his contracts and liabilities, was out of the picture. DMG didn't want to take over, Carr says, "but if Tom canceled his show, we would try to put something up



Butler Field, Monday evening

at Navy Pier for the dealers that would be left stranded." Tullman says Blackman stalled at this point, and later on Monday DMG concluded there wasn't enough time—even if they delayed the show's opening by a day—to move it to the Pier. Monday evening DMG issued a statement that they'd determined not to become involved in any capacity.

Meanwhile galleries exhibiting at the fair were kept in the dark. At 1 AM last Sunday, Blackman sent them an e-mail announcing "difficulties with the set-up" due to "problems with the new floor and some labor issues due to the same." The e-mail said the fair would still open on Thursday, but dealers wouldn't be able to install their art until Wednesday morning. Alarmed, a core group of local dealers and members of the Chicago Art Dealers Association who'd been promoting the fair called a hurried series of meetings. "We've been trying to see if we can come up with the money or another person who might put the show up," dealer Carl Hammer said Monday, adding that he'd be out

\$20,000 if the show were canceled. "The whole city of Chicago takes it on the chin for this." Blackman had a frenzied series of meetings that extended late into the day on Tuesday, including one in which he implored the park district to help keep the show in the tent. On Wednesday he announced that Art Chicago would be held in the Merchandise Mart and open on time—with an invitation-only party Thursday night and public opening at 11 AM Friday.

Nova Heads for the Beach

Nova Art Fair, which was counting on luring some of Art Chicago's audience to the far reaches of the City Suites Hotel at 933 W. Belmont, is one of the first groups to make use of the city's new indoor special event license, designated for short-term gigs hosted by nonprofits in venues that don't have a public place of amusement license. (The license costs \$100 per day and triggers five city inspections, but may keep your ware-

house party from getting shut down.) It's showcasing 35 galleries, each in its own room and each, according to director Michael Workman, paying \$2,500 to \$3,500 for the privilege. Workman says the total Nova Chicago budget is about \$140,000; festivities include a fashion show on the el and artists' project spaces in neighboring businesses. In December Nova will also catch a ride on the coattails of Art Basel in Miami Beach, where Workman expects to host 60 exhibitors at \$5,500 each at the Catalina Hotel and Beach Club.

Making Do

Navy Pier Walk, the annual sculpture show that traditionally kicked off on art-fair weekend, will be late this year and a shadow of its former self. (The target date is Memorial Day.) In its glory days the show dotted the Pier with impressively scaled work by two or three dozen sculptors, but for the past couple years it's been relegated to Gateway Park, the grassy area in front of the main entrance.

Director Joe Tabet says it'll be there again this year, but construction plans at the Pier have forced him and his group to reinvent the exhibit. For the next three years they'll mount a series of overlapping solo shows consisting of a half-dozen pieces by a total of about 20 artists, curated by west-coast critics Dave Hickey and David Pagel. The upside is the work will be displayed year-round, not just in the summer. Tabet says they're still accepting submissions.

Going Mobile

Pritzker Park was the buzz at a party for artists thrown by the Chicago Art Project (formerly the Chicago Art Foundation) earlier this month. Executive director Paul Klein said the little park is the favorite among a half-dozen South Loop sites for CAP's newest potential incarnation: a "long-term temporary" museum for Chicago art, made up of a dozen or more 8-by-40-foot shipping containers. One of the containers is envisioned as a mobile unit that would debut at Daley Plaza and then be dispatched to the neighborhoods, where it would function as a learning center staffed by volunteer artists with teaching certificates. Board president Heiji Choy Black said the group aims to raise \$2 million over the next three years and needs \$300,000 to deliver the container museum. CAP is showing 40 local artists at Nova.

What It Costs to Look

It's not about the money, the Art Institute says of the recent announcement that its \$12 suggested admission fee will be mandatory beginning in June. "It's not a revenue builder," spokesperson Erin Hogan says, adding that it'll affect just 10 percent of the museum's 1.5 million attendees. Hogan says AI is "one of the last Chicago museums" to have a discretionary fee and is trying to bring itself "in line with the other museums in the city." Free times are also being moved, from all-day Tuesday to 5 to 9 PM Thursdays and Fridays in the summer, 5 to 8 PM Thursdays during the rest of the year, and three weeks in the dregs of February. In the only clear nod to public benefit, the maximum age for free kids' admission is going from 5 to 12; entrance for students and seniors remains at \$7 and will also be mandatory. **B**

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Restaurants

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Reader staff and contributors and (where noted) individual Raters. Though reviewers try to reflect the Restaurant Raters' input, reviews should be considered one person's opinion; the collective Raters' opinions are best expressed in the numbers. The complete listings and information on how to become a Reader Restaurant Rater are available at www.chicagoreader.com/restaurantfinder.

R

Vegging Out

Chicago-Style Cooking, Hold the Bad Karma

It's not likely that Hot Doug's will ever pitch a sausage that tastes like brussels sprouts. But at Lake Side Cafe, a vegetarian restaurant in Rogers Park, cook Jeff Winkowski is doing his best to make veggies taste like meat. Back in March he gave a class in Chicago-style cooking—without all that nasty animal flesh. He built a Reuben out of seitan, sliced to ragged thinness and dyed with beet juice to give it the ruddy color of corned beef. Then he baked a pizza stuffed with soy cheese and seitan.

"This really looks like Italian sausage," said Winkowski, rolling the crumbly wheat gluten between his fingers. "It really tastes like Italian sausage."

Lake Side's menu also includes a Chicago-style Polish made of wheat gluten and soy protein isolate, a tempeh-based sloppy joe, and fettuccine Alfredo with a wheat-based chicken substitute. (A lot of foods taste like chicken, but "chicken" isn't one of them.) Winkowski's wife, Malissa, bakes organic vegan pastries, many using low-gluten spelt flour. Three other cooks come up with the rotating weekly specials emphasizing organic ingredients.

Winkowski, who's 30, has a tattoo of the city's rat-prevention logo on his shoulder. He used to play in a hardcore/thrash band in Milwaukee. He became a vegetarian at age 17, after meeting a group of Hare Krishnas on the Washington Mall. Almost immediately he gave up the fried fish and the hot ham and rolls that were part of growing up Catholic in Milwaukee.

"I asked them, 'Why are you vegetarians?'" he says. "The guy said, 'I'm trying to be more conscious of God.' I couldn't think of any other reason to eat meat other than that I really enjoyed it. I couldn't think of myself killing an animal just because I liked the way it tasted."

Winkowski also became a Hare Krishna devotee—he and his wife moved to Rogers Park in 2005 in part because of the temple at Clark and Lunt. At the time he'd worked at Chicago Diner for a couple of years and was seeking to get out of the restaurant biz. Then a friend pointed out a help-wanted ad in *Conscious Choice* that led him to Lake Side. The restaurant, which opened in October, is attached to the Inner Metamorphosis University, a storefront school offering yoga and meditation classes inspired by the teachings of guru Bhashkar Perinchery. Its staff and its owner, Amona Buechler, are all committed to eschewing meat.

"They have a saying in the East—'What you eat, you are,'" said Jeffrey Tippman, who runs the school



Jeff Winkowski with the Lake Side Cafe's deep-dish pizza, the Ditka

with Buechler. "When a pig is slaughtered it feels fear. When you eat pork you absorb that fear and aggression on a subtle level."

Lake Side may be affiliated with a school of meditation, but with its wall of windows, comfortable seating, and recycling bin right next to the trash can, it has a relaxing neighborhood feel that attracts customers beyond the mystic set. There are coffee and espresso drinks for the readers. Tea comes to the table in a strainer, with a treat such as a pair of malted-milk balls on the side.

Winkowski sees the irony in Chicago-style vegetarian cooking—meat's been part of our image since the stockyards. But he wants to change the city's dining habits. And he thinks he knows how to start. For months he's been trying to persuade Mike Ditka to try Lake Side's stuffed pizza, which has a nicely chewy crust but goes down lighter than the meat-and-cheese bombs at Uno and is called—what else—the Ditka.

But Ditka's been busy running his steak house, promoting arena football, and hawking his new book, *In Life, First You Kick Ass*.

"I plan on converting Mike to vegetarianism by July," Winkowski says. "I'd like to get him to Rogers Park, take him to the Hare Krishna temple. That would blow his outlook on life."

But maybe vegetarianism isn't inconsistent with kicking ass. Winkowski, who says he used to be a "wiry skateboarder," started lifting weights because he didn't want to look like a weedy hippie. Now his tattooed arms strain against the sleeves of his fitted button-down shirts.

"I started working out because I wasn't going to settle for a mediocre diet," he said. "There's a lot of people who are satisfied eating rice and starches and reading poetry. There's this stereotype of mellow, acoustic-guitar-playing vegetarians. I thought we were getting away from that." —Edward McClelland

In the Neighborhood

Selected restaurants in Rogers Park

A & T Restaurant

7036 N. Clark | 773-274-0036

\$

AMERICAN, BREAKFAST, BURGERS | BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS

Every time I've eaten at the A & T (for "Abundant and Tasty") I've asked what the soups were, only to choose the chicken, and it's never failed me. It's always slightly different—sometimes more cloudy, sometimes more golden, sometimes more briny, sometimes more oniony, sometimes with a little more fat floating on top. On a cold winter afternoon, divested of some of its abundant noodles and with a few squishy rolls and butter on the side, it's manna. The rest of the fare at this neighborhood place covers the classics, but with no real weak spots. Among the best bets are the all-day breakfasts—a gargantuan demilune omelet with feta, olives, and tomatoes; off-the-bone grilled ham with buttery scrambled eggs. Frankly, I've never had anything bad at the A & T. Just be sure to ask for your hash browns crispy. **Elizabeth M. Tamny**

Ambala Sweets

2741 W. Devon | 773-764-9000

\$

INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS

With marble floors, mirrored walls, and glass doors with gold handles, Ambala feels like an upscale department store. Sitting tidily in its front window are stacked squares of green pistachio *barfi*, a milk-based dessert with a fudgelike texture. Other traditional sweets are heaped on the long, gracefully curving counter inside, under immaculate plastic domes. The counter workers give out samples hand over fist, chatting with customers in Hindi, Urdu, and English and happily providing explanations to the uninitiated. "This is number one. This is very fast selling," says one, proffering a chunk of *habshi halwa*—a sticky brown treat made with milk, wheat flour, and cashews. It has the consistency of an underdone brownie, and, like many Indian desserts, tastes alarmingly sweet to the unaccustomed palate. The store carries several variants, including *gajar halwa* (made with carrots) and *anjeer halwa* (with figs). *Pera*, a doughy orange confection, is prepared with dried milk and cardamom, colored with saffron, shaped into small patties, and sprinkled with chopped pistachios. Some of the sweets

are even more elaborately fashioned: imarti look like crullers dyed orange, while the saffron-flavored fritters called *jalebi* resemble raw pretzels. *Suterfeni*, fried threads of sweetened rice flour flavored with saffron, is meant to be doused with milk and eaten out of a bowl. Nearly all of the desserts are sold by weight, and a large sign on the wall lists the prices per pound, most of them between \$5 and \$8. Ambala sells savory treats too, including Ambala Mix, a blend of puffed rice, peanuts, cashews, potato chips, and raisins; a spicier version called *ferrari chevda*; and *dalmoth*, a mix of thin dried noodles, brown lentils, and cashews. There are several tables, with seating for about 30. **Anne Ford**

Argo Bakery

2812 W. Devon | 773-764-6322

\$

POLISH/RUSSIAN/EASTERN EUROPEAN | 9 AM TO 7 PM MONDAY-SATURDAY, 9 AM TO 6 PM SUNDAY | CASH ONLY

The Georgian breads here are baked in a large brick dome called a *tune*, and the dough is stuck directly to the inner walls of the oven, as with Indian naan. The result—which comes in a large round or a smaller torpedo-shaped loaf—is soft, chewy, and incredibly flavorful. Other specialties include *hachapuri*, bread filled with mushrooms or the gooey combination of feta, mozzarella, and farmer cheese; *lobiani*, bread stuffed with cilantro-and-anise-

spiced beans; and *tapluna*, a baklava with honey and walnuts. There's not an item over \$2, and the turnover is so high that you stand a good chance of buying something hot out of the oven. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

Bhabi's Kitchen

6352 N. Oakley | 773-764-7007

F 79 | S 8.0 | A 6.5 | \$ (8 REPORTS)

INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: TILL 11 EVERY NIGHT | BYO

Once a humble storefront, Bhabi's Kitchen has been swanked up to become one of the more pleasantly appointed Indo-Pak restaurants around Devon (prices have risen accordingly). Mr. Syed, the owner, is a

genial presence; ask him what's good and he'll passionately regale you with a stream of talk for as long as you'll listen. This time around he recommended *haleem*, beef simmered for many hours with wheat and lentils and sprinkled with fried onions, an intriguing combination of flavors and textures. Butter chicken comes bathed in a mild tomato broth, toned down for less adventurous palates. There are a good number of vegetarian offerings here, among them biryani (also available in fish or meat renditions) and *sarsoo ka sang*, a puree of broccoli rabe sparkling with explosive ginger chunks. Syed orchestrates meals so that tastes won't blur; for instance, *bagarey baigan*, an eggplant dish, is cooked in a hummuslike sesame sauce also used in the

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