

## Going green from the top down, Schera's plans rooftop garden

by Shannon Durbin

Over the past three years Brian Bruening and Frederique Boudouani, owners of Schera's restaurant in Elkader, have been taking steps to make their restaurant more environmentally friendly. This year they are starting at the top with a rooftop garden, otherwise known as a green roof.

Customers will be able to experience these changes over the year as homegrown lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers and herbs of parsley, cilantro, rosemary, sage, and thyme enter their entrees.

"Ideally we will have a three season garden," says Bruening, who is also the head chef at the restaurant. "This first year is an experimental year, of course."

The couple are planning on testing quality, taste, and amount and recording their findings in a working journal. "If we end up growing too much, the farmer's market is literally right next door [in Keystone Park]," says Bruening.

In addition to food quality, Schera's rooftop garden will eventually lead to a financial savings by cutting the cost of food purchases and helping with insulating the building.

"We are taking advantage of wasted real estate," says Boudouani. "You can basically use rooftops for energy conservation in two ways, solar energy, which is a substantial investment, or green roofs which are more affordable and adds an additional benefit to our business [produce]."

Boudouani sites Europe, Canada, and Chicago as being leaders in green roof technology. In his research he came across a test done on a building in Chicago. Half of the roof was green and the other was left in its original state. Temperatures taken on the two different areas showed what Boudouani said was a possible 35° difference. "Rooftop gardens absorb the heat."

Schera's restaurant has two large rooftops available for their gardens as well as parts of the patio overlooking the Turkey River. "We had some plants out last year and it helped soften the aesthetic and create a relaxing atmosphere," says Bruening.

Pots of tomatoes and raised beds of lettuce are the first planned produce of year. The couple is considering purchasing mostly heirloom and organic seeds for taste quality. "There is a green zebra tomato at

Seed Savers [a national organization in Decorah specializing in heirloom seeds] that is the best tasting tomato I have ever had," says Bruening. The "seed to table" aspect of the project has customers excited for the first taste tests. The concept gives "fresh" and "local" new meaning

when it comes directly from above that same day.

Schera's is also looking into installing a rainwater collection feature to harvest water. "Not only will this cut some costs it will also reduce the amount of overflow into the sewer system," says Bruening.



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*Frederique Boudouani*

