

NYDailyNews.com

**DAILY NEWS** Queens

## Queens Plaza is cooking up a hot new lunch scene with influx of workers

**Triple Shot World Atlas, Checkers among the new arrivals to ‘up-and-coming’ destination**

By Vera Chinese / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Friday, March 2, 2012, 6:00 AM



**Luca Pipponi is the owner of Triple Shot World Atlas, a cafe that opened last week on Queens Plaza South in Long Island City.**

Queens Plaza's facelift is entering a new phase — beckoning a new batch of eateries seeking to cash in on the traffic hub's new caché.

Once known for its traffic jams, adult entertainment and prostitutes, the borough's gateway off the Queensboro Bridge is beginning to draw a new lunch scene.

The city Health Department recently moved into an office building that replaced a dreary municipal parking garage. And nearly 1,000 JetBlue staffers are scheduled to move to Queens Plaza this month. They will soon be joined by the City University of New York School of Law.

Triple Shot World Atlas, a cafe with well-known locations in Williamsburg and the lower East Side, began selling its frothy lattes and sandwiches on baguettes on Queens Plaza South last week.

Owner Luca Pipponi, 38, who lives in Astoria with his wife and business partner Nadia, said he was drawn to the up-and-coming neighborhood due in part to the recent uptick in foot traffic.

"It looks like it's going to become the new Times Square," Pipponi said from behind the counter while serving the lunch crowd on a recent Tuesday.

For those searching for a quick bite, the burger chain Checkers opened in mid-February just two storefronts down from Atlas.

Owner Rod Valencia, who runs 20 fast food restaurants throughout the city, said he also was drawn to Queens Plaza for the number of people who walk it every day.

"It's high foot traffic," he said. "And I think the demographic of that area fits the brand."

Resobox, an art gallery on nearby 27th St., began serving up Japanese-style coffee two months ago and manager Takashi Ikezawa said city workers looking for a bold cup of joe keep him busy.

To make the coffee, known as nel drip, water flows slowly from a swan-neck kettle into a filter cone. One cup of coffee might take four minutes to brew, he said.

"We we use a very special filter to brew the coffee," he said. "It's stronger than any other coffee."

The cafe also serves specialty ramen noodles during exhibitions.

Other local business owners said the rising tide is raising all ships.

Vic Nair, the manager of Lucky Pizza whose parents have owned the pizzeria for 25 years, has seen Queens Plaza change from seedy scene to a bustling block in the past few years.

And vacant shops are becoming rarer, he said.

"This block is very hot now."

Dan Miner, business vice president of the Long Island City Partnership, said the organization has been paying close attention to retail vacancies there and tries to woo potential tenants.

“As more development on Queens Plaza becomes apparent to people, more potential retailers will look to it for the future,” he said.

A new Asian-fusion restaurant will be opening on the block, he said, and he has heard rumors of a Japanese barbecue coming soon.

Eric Benaim, owner of the local real estate firm Modern Spaces NYC, said 700 condos and rental apartments are expected to hit the market soon in four Queens Plaza buildings. He said buzz started swirling around the area when JetBlue announced its move from Forest Hills and his agents have already started leasing to airline employees.

“We’re really counting on this area,” he said. “It’s the next up-and-coming neighborhood in Long Island City.”