

# Central to feature more formal restaurant

BY GREG OLIVER  
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CENTRAL — A new restaurant will soon open in Central that promises to provide a more formal dining atmosphere.

Local business owner Ed Martin and award-winning chef Jeff Opperman said the Red Minnow Dinner Club would require reservations with a menu specializing in trout. Shrimp and grits will also be available.

"It's not a place to come in and plop down," Martin said.

Martin said he is fortunate to have Opperman, an award-winning chef in North Carolina for the past four years and a longtime family friend, to assist him in the venture. Opperman said the trout would consist of an eight- to 10-ounce serving — not a traditional South Carolina cut.

"These trout are organically grown in a pond and are between four to five pounds before they are processed to ensure maximum flavor," Opperman said. "There is no head and no fin bones on the fish."

The restaurant will feature the Cherokee Room, containing authentic Native American artifacts that include mounted wooden figures: the Fly Fisherman's Room, with

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**Jeff Opperman**  
Chef, Red Minnow Dinner Club

weighters, fly rods and fishing poles; and The Cabin, featuring a fireplace and the appearance of stepping inside an old cabin with artifacts and the feeling of going back in time.

Opperman practically grew up in the restaurant business. His dad served as executive chef of the Keowee Key Country Club when it was owned by the Ford family and later opened a restaurant in Clemson called "Geno's Biscuit House."

Growing up in the Clemson area, Opperman attended high school with Martin's sister, Lynn Martin (Ed was a few years older). After going their separate ways following graduation, they reconnected when Lynn Martin, her boyfriend and a group of friends began frequenting a Lake Toxaway, N.C., restaurant where Opperman was chef. In January, while visiting in South Carolina, Opperman was invited to Ed and Karen Martin's home to cook dinner.

During one of their

conversations, Martin asked his friend if he ever envisioned himself returning to Central to open a restaurant.

"I said 'Ed, if the opportunity ever came about, the chance to come back and open a restaurant and have you as my partner is something I would do and never look back,'" Opperman said.

During the next 60 days, the restaurant that once housed Villa Luigi and Villa Novella became available. Further discussions with the Martins led to the concept of starting the first gourmet dinner club in Central. Not only will there be a restaurant, but Martin said the Red Minnow Dinner Club — a concept that began at his home — is also open to private clubs on Tuesday nights.

"Jeff, Karen and I started the Red Minnow Dinner Club at my house," Martin said. "We invited individuals to dinner to work with the chef, Jeff buys the ingredients and they cook under his direction.



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**Central businessman Ed Martin, left, and longtime friend Jeff Opperman have been busy preparing for the opening of the Red Minnow Dinner Club, scheduled for later this month.**

Then, we sit down and have a nice meal."

Opperman said he hopes to have a class each Tuesday at an average cost of \$50 to \$60 per person, depending on the meals from which they have to choose.

"These are all five-star restaurants I served for two years and I kept the menus," Opperman said. "When I say you get a five course meal, you're truly going to get a five course meal for the money. Individuals receive the recipes and I basically oversee and instruct four to five per course.

"They can also take the recipes home to cook for their family and friends for a great evening."

According to Martin, the restaurant will seat about 100 people inside and outside and is expected to open April 20. Normal operating hours will be from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and brunch on Sunday.

"It's exciting and something that is a new experience for me," Martin said. "I'm more of the business end and Jeff's the restaurant end and that's why we make good pair."

Additional information on the restaurant's official opening and other details can be obtained

by calling (864) 639-0076