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## Dining

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MANLYN K. TULLER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

**POPULAR SPOT** The Plaza Food Hall is gaining more space this week and will add 17 food-themed shops in the spring.

## Plaza Food Hall Is Growing

By GLENN COLLINS

**C**ALL it the food hall that ate the concourse.

When a luxury shopping center opened in the basement of the Plaza hotel during the 2008 economic meltdown, it struggled because it was underground and underpopulated — until the chef Todd English opened his Plaza Food Hall in the same concourse in June 2010.

Within weeks, there were lines; these days, it is not unusual to wait 45 minutes to be seated for lunch and 25 minutes for dinner. The fare, diverse and moderately priced for the neighborhood (a burger goes for \$14), attracts an average of 1,500 diners and takeout customers daily. Last year it generated \$8.2 million in revenue, said Kristin Franzese, the Plaza's retail executive vice president.

Now the food operation is growing even bigger, in two phases.

On Wednesday, the hotel is to open a \$3 million expansion to the food hall that increases the chef's space, and his menu, by 10 percent.

In April 2012, after most of the non-

food stores in the concourse have been closed or relocated, 17 food-themed shops will open in their place. Among them will be La Maison du Chocolat, Tartinery, Sant Ambroeu desserts, Lady M Cake Boutique, Luke's Lobster, and Sushi of Gari, as well as others to be announced. The concourse will grow to 22,000 square feet from 18,000, after a down-to-the-studs renovation and reconfiguration — for an additional \$3 million — by the designer Jeffrey Beers.

In recent years the concourse, with its high-end jewelry and clothing, suffered because of the recession, and also "because luxury brands didn't want to locate downstairs when they were already upstairs on a great retail street," Ms. Franzese said, referring to Fifth Avenue. But the food hall has drawn tourists, local office workers and visitors from the Plaza, which is now a condominium as well as a hotel.

Mr. English said, "We hope that our expansion will give diners a new sense of diversity."

The revamped food hall that opens this week extends the current 100-seat space eastward, creating a new 132-

seat, 500-square-foot hall. Besides a beefed-up grab-and-go retail component, it will add a 35-foot-long, 21-seat pasta bar of Carrara marble, presided over by the hall's executive chef, Michael Soppa.

There will also be a new 17-seat cocktail bar — "finally we'll have enough room to do mixology," Mr. English said — and a cheese-and-charcuterie shop, as well as a sommelier's tasting table adjacent to 28 rentable wine lockers. A chef's demonstration table will be directly under the escalator to Central Park South.

The food hall is a major draw for hotel guests, "who feel comfortable eating there as singles," Ms. Franzese said, and has helped fill the void left by the legendary Oak Room and Oak Bar, which closed in July. The Edwardian Room, shut in 2004, will become a retail space early next year. The Palm Court reopened last year.

Mr. English said that he was not raising prices, and that "we hope to continue to get really diverse diners — you know, the 212s, the 646s, the 917s, the 201s and the 914s."