

From a dry goods store to mouth-watering pizza

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A local restaurant is planning to make its home in the old Sharpe's building on Graham Avenue.

Jack Mullen and his wife Andrea, Pryor, are working to get the historic building into shape before summer. They hope to relocate their restaurant, Sam & Ella's Chicken Palace, to Main Street.

Sam & Ella's has been in Pryor since August 2007. In addition to serving traditional pizzas, subs and salads, Mullen's restaurant offers specialty pizzas, which are not on the menu. Mullen said his regular customers know about the specialty pizzas, and the restaurant makes them on request.

Two specialties are the chicken dill pickle pizza, which is an appetizer, and the cheeseburger pizza. Sam & Ella's uses mustard on the cheeseburger pizza. After coming out of the oven, it is topped with lettuce, tomatoes and dill pickles.

Mullen said he plans to carry the same menu in the new location. After renovation, the building on Main Street will hold a capacity of approximately 175 people. The square footage of the building is approximately 5,000 feet.

Mullen hired Dawson Roofing to re-roof the building approximately two months ago, in November.

Dawson Roofing completely replaced the roof after removing two drop ceilings.

Mullen had the plastic covering removed to expose the brick walls inside the structure. He said the carpenters are at work now. They installed a stairwell leading to the mezzanine deck, which will be used for the office.

"They're really moving along pretty well," said Mullen.

The name "Sam & Ella's" is a play on words. When Mullen was in junior high, a classmate pointed out how salmonella, a bacteria acquired from eating bad chicken, sounded like "Sam and Ella." Mullen remembered the play on words into his adult life. When he started his first restaurant in Tahlequah in 1999, he named it Sam & Ella's Chicken Palace.

Mullen said he and his wife have been through a renovation process before. Their current Tahlequah facility used to be the old Redman shop, built in 1860.

Mullen expects to move into the old Sharpe's building in April or May, but he is not rushing it.

"We just look forward to being in there," Mullen said.