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By [Tim Schooley](#) – Reporter, Pittsburgh Business Times
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When it comes to assessing where his local restaurant chain stands in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Gordon Sheffer reports Waffles INCAffeiNated in a state of relative good health and ready to grow.

“Really, all our stores have pretty much been performing,” said Sheffer, managing director of the restaurant. “We’re quite happy with the performance of all the stores.”

So much so, in fact, that Sheffer and company have a lease in place to take over a former King’s Family Restaurant at 155 McMurray Road in Upper St. Clair and a deal in place for another new restaurant in the works for a location in Irwin near Route 30.

Sheffer said the goal is to open both new locations of the breakfast restaurant by the end of the year.

It's a busy time for Waffles INCaffeinated, a restaurant that started in Beaver County and built a following around its sourdough-batter waffles and often gourmet-level menu, with expansion on the immediate horizon, along with a new in-house wine and franchising a part of the mix.

Started out of a house in New Brighton in 2010, the restaurant that soon generated a pretty broad following opened its second restaurant at the SouthSide Works in 2012. It has expanded to a total of four locations, the other two in Wexford as well as in the Kaufmann's Grand on Fifth redevelopment downtown. Sheffer reports that The Kaufmann's Grand location, forced to open late after construction delays, is holding its own, despite all of downtown's challenges.

"Surprisingly, Fifth Avenue has been performing quite well," he said. "We've been busy there."

To be sure, the restaurant faced the same challenges all restaurants and all businesses did during the pandemic, with Waffles INCaffeinated accessing the PPP program and slogging through the various governmental public health restrictions.

Sheffer noted his staff's role in keeping the restaurant going through the worst of coronavirus.

"To be frank, I'd say I've been fortunate because our core staff stayed with us even though I practically laid everybody off," he said of the hard business choices the pandemic often forced. "Our core staff has been really dedicated."

Sheffer said Waffles has been working to ramp up pay and other incentives for staff, given how they kept the restaurant going amid the pandemic and the challenging labor market these days.

He added the restaurant has also introduced its own wine, working with Presque Isle Winery to produce a Vidal Blanc that is part of the brunch mix.

Through a challenging period, Sheffer expressed every reason for optimism and for Waffles INCaffeinated to aggressively pursue growth and expansion.

"You either have to keep shooting or put your guns away. We think we have a great brand and people really love our food," said Sheffer. "We consider our future to be quite bright."

Mark Anderson, a senior vice president for retail brokerage at Colliers International, who represented the former King's restaurant in Upper St. Clair, said his group has been talking to Gordon for some time and expects Waffles INCaffeinated to be a great fit for the 3,000-square-foot location.

"The demographics in that area are phenomenal. You've got a lot of rooftops and high incomes. It's surrounded by people," he said of the community.

At the same time, added Anderson, "There's not a whole lot of options in the South Hills in general. You hear from a lot of folks who live down there that they want more restaurants."

"I think Waffles INCaffeinated will kill it there," he said.