



THE BLACK HARP

opens in New Plymouth

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THE BLACK HARP

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Try this: Co-owner Kevin Gibson at the bar of The Black Harp, pictured at right, which has just opened in New Plymouth.

Photos: PIP GUTHRIE

City gets a laid-back, cosy Irish pub

Rochelle West

Anyone who has spent time in the United Kingdom will know the warmth and comfort of the traditional Irish pub. Now a true Irish pub experience can be found in New Plymouth, with the opening of The Black Harp, next to Joe's Garage on Gover St.

Its laid-back, cosy atmosphere, combined with an extensive range of tap beers, wines and good food, is already proving popular among those

seeking that special type of Irish hospitality, co-owner Karyn Grant says. "We have been open six weeks and in that time we have been exceptionally well received by a very wide audience," Karyn says.

"There's been a lot of people who have spent time in Ireland, England or Scotland who have been looking for a really comfortable pub, where there is food all day and a whole variety of music and entertainment."

In the former Rosie O'Grady premises, Karyn, husband and general manager Kevin Gibson, as well as Craig and Kate Macfarlane, have

poured a substantial amount of time and money into making The Black Harp a warm, relaxed and inviting place to be.

All four names are synonymous for producing successful hospitality businesses, both in Taranaki and throughout New Zealand. They have used that wealth of experience to create something they feel is truly unique in New Plymouth.

"We wanted to invest in people's comfort," says Karen. "There is a real intimacy and warmth here, which I think comes from the staff, as well as the surroundings."

Those surroundings have been made particularly inviting thanks to its owners' flair for design. With a den-like feel, featuring various areas where people can either enjoy the company of a group or hide away with a quiet drink, The Black Harp is packed with an array of interesting memorabilia.

One booth boasts black-and-white photographs of a bygone era of the hotels that once stood proud on the Joe's Garage and The Black Harp site. Above the main fireplace, a stuffed wild boar rules, while folk-type instruments are displayed nearby.

But this pub wouldn't truly be Irish,

if it wasn't for the presence of Ireland's greatest rock band U2 – well, a framed electric guitar signed by the band's members, anyway. Loaned to the pub by a generous local supporter who saw The Black Harp as the perfect place to share his prized possession, U2's guitar takes pride of place on the back wall.

"It's all part of what makes The Black Harp. It's all about a sense of community and belonging here," Karyn says.

A lot of the furnishings adorning The Black Harp – including an ornate black

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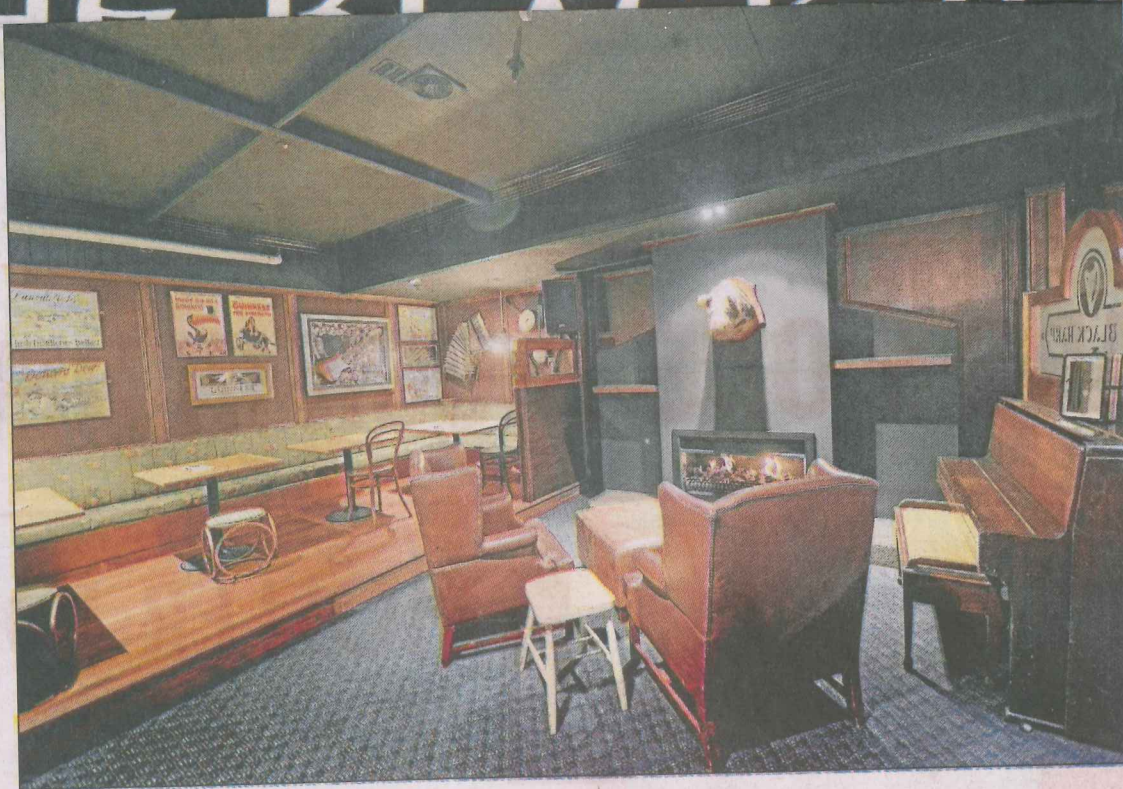
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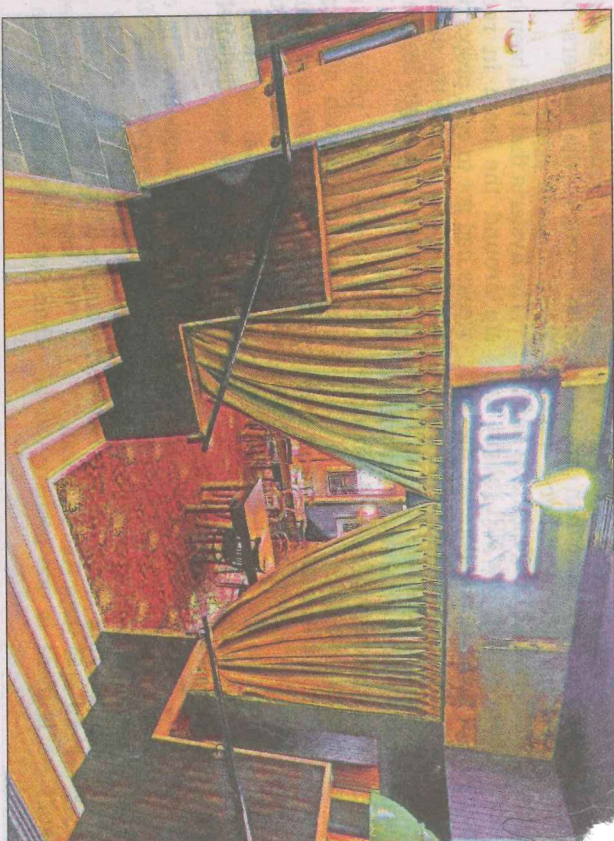
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THE BLACK HARP



More: The bar above is complemented by an area dubbed "the dining room", down a few stairs from the main bar and adjoining the kitchen.

Memorabilia adds to decor

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harp mounted above the bar - have been sourced from the Irish pub in Wellington with the same name, which closed down in 2011.

The Irish rugby team also feature. A framed, signed rugby jersey from former captain Brian O'Driscoll, gifted by the former manager of the original Black Harp, and a separate, framed jersey signed by the 2010 Steinlager Series Irish Squad are at the entrance.

Added to the various booths, tables and comfortable leather chairs facing the fire, is an area dubbed "the dining room", which is down a few stairs from the main bar and adjoining the kitchen. Curios are important here, too, from the taxidermy duck and rabbit on the wall, to black-and-white and sepia photographs of Karyn's Irish ancestors.

Through heavy ornate glass-and-polished-wood doors is the outside area, facing Gover St, where patrons can engage in a game of pool, watch sport on the big-screen TV or simply enjoy a drink. An impressive pressed-tin ceiling adorns this area, with the quirky theme continuing overhead, thanks to an imitation deer antler lightshade. A fire and outdoor heaters keep this area toasty.

Like any good Irish pub, The Black Harp has a sizeable list of international tap beers on offer, from Guinness to Kilkenny, Boddingtons and Emerson's Bookbinder. There's also a vast array of bottled beer varieties, wine, spirits, Irish and Scotch whiskies.

Food is available from the extensive all-day menu. You can choose from a light meal, burger or salad. The Black Harp's signature seafood chowder or fresh Clevedon oyster platters. There's also a variety of more substantial meals, such as The Black Harp's own beef-and-Guinness pie, and the Irish grill, featuring black pudding. Local free-range pork is the star of the 'Only on a Sunday' roast, available all day and to be enjoyed family style.

Then there is the entertainment on offer. Music is an important feature of The Black Harp, from the Irish and Americana-folk music played over the speakers, to the live music nights. Musicians perform Thursday and Saturday evenings, as well as Sunday afternoons, while traditional live Irish music is performed every third Friday of the month. There's even a quiz night every Tuesday.

After all, one can never have too much Irish hospitality.

