

Changing times mean end in sight for family restaurant

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By SONJA SLINGER

NEW PLYMOUTH'S Cobb and Co is about to take its last order.

The family restaurant is moving out of The State Hotel in Devon St to make way for a new restaurant as an extension of the trendier Burton's Bar.

And that could happen within a month.

Cobb and Co advertised the franchise for the New Plymouth restaurant two weeks ago but spokesman Peter Logan, Auckland would not say what the response had been and he refused to comment yesterday.

The Cobb and Co has been in New Plymouth for around 15 years but if it is to continue it will be in a new location — if anybody is interested in taking it on.

Speculation that the restaurant, which has become a New Zealand icon, was closing has been rife in the city for months and yesterday, when approached by The Daily News, current franchise holder and State Hotel proprietor Neil Walsh confirmed Cobb and Co was moving out.

But he said its future in Taranaki was up to the restaurant chain.

"Cobb and Co will make their own arrangements as to where it goes. When that will happen I don't know," he said.

Mr Walsh, who has run the hotel since 1992 after returning home from Australia, said he was getting out of Cobb and Co because it no longer gelled with plans to further upgrade the hotel.

"The Cobb and Co has been a great family tradition over the past 20 years in New Zealand and we have been thrilled to be associated with it.

"But with the way we are now marketing the hotel, it no longer fits comfortably with our future ideas."

Revamping of the former Cobb bar in 1993 and renaming it Burton's, had been a great success with its open air bar and cafe-style meals.

"We are going to continue along that vein," Mr Walsh, who has been



LAST ORDERS PLEASE: Neil Walsh has big plans for New Plymouth's State Hotel
Photo: DWAYNE SENIOR

involved in Cobb and Co for 19 years, said.

● MEANWHILE, Valentines, a chain of casual dining restaurants, is planning to open in New Plymouth next year.

Business development manager Keith Routledge confirmed yesterday that the company, which operates nine restaurants in New Zealand and will open a further seven this year, including two in Australia, had plans for New

Plymouth. Several sites had been identified and Mr Routledge was confident there was a market here.

"We want to be in every town in New Zealand. We definitely want a presence in Taranaki.

"There's a move towards branded restaurants. People feel secure with the knowledge of what that brand offers them."

The Valentines outlet would be a franchise operation.