

Inside Business

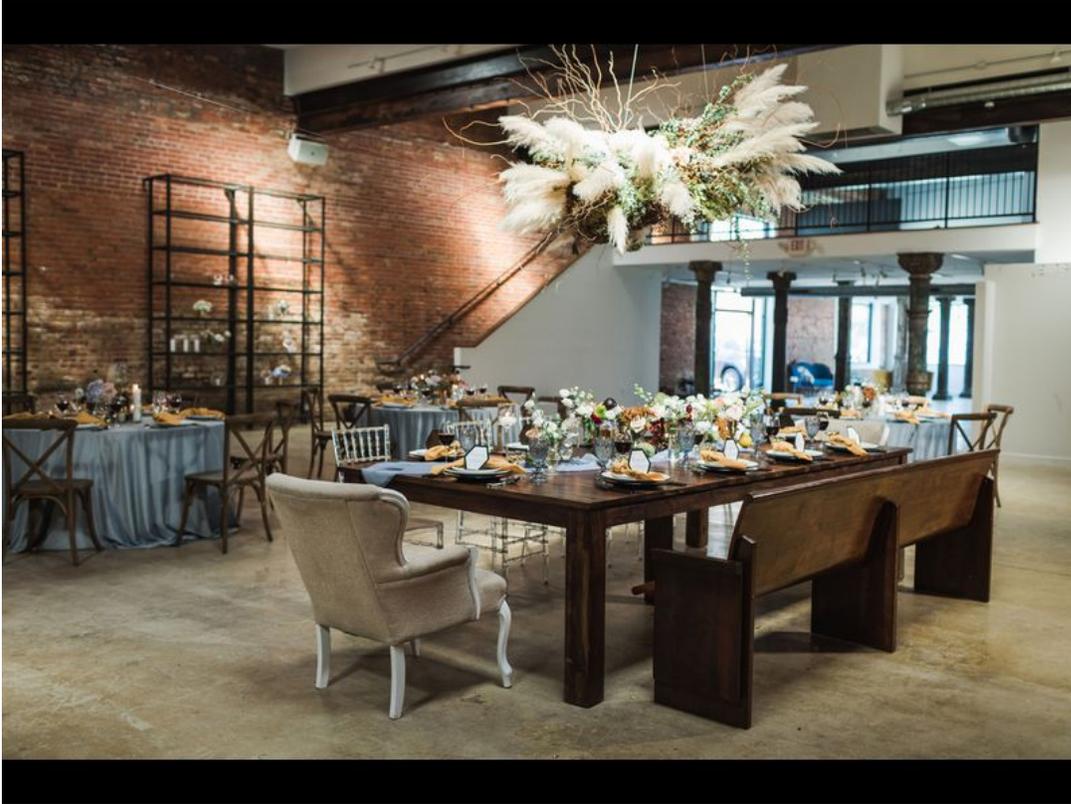
Virginia Beach caterers expand into event space in Neon District

By TREVOR METCALFE

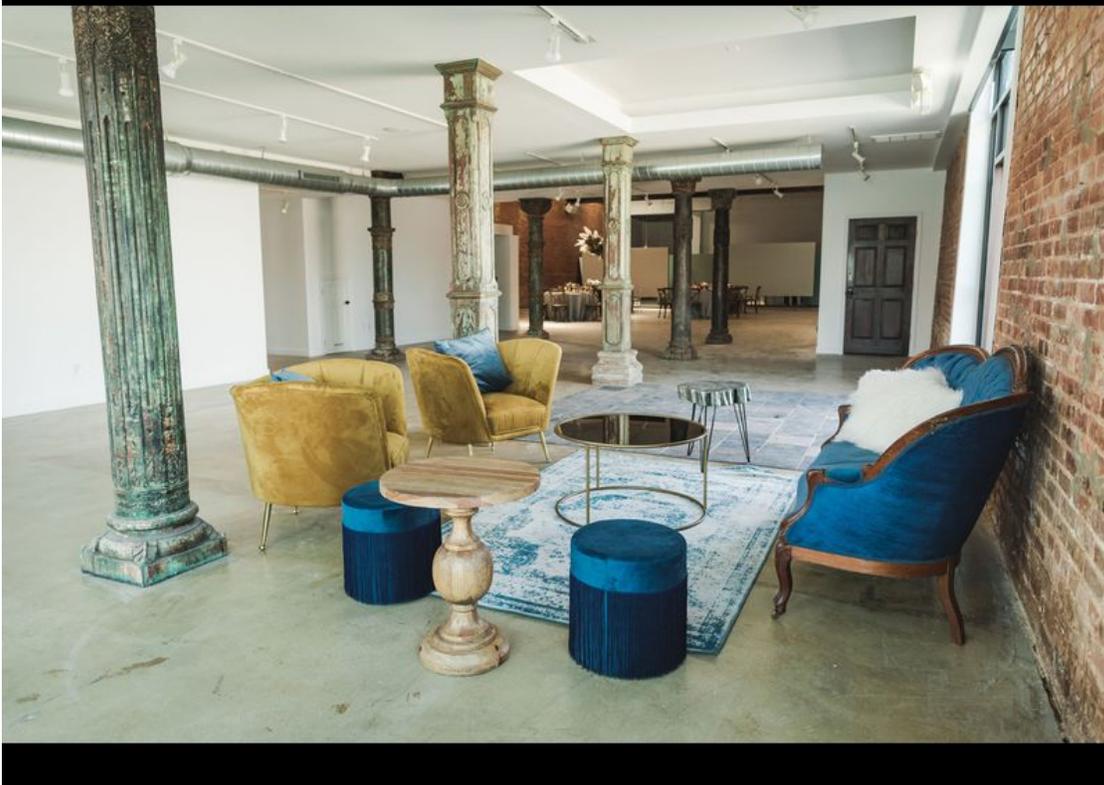
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John and Marcy Telfer show off the ground floor of The Neon House, a new 12,000-square-foot event space in the former Exotic Home Coastal Outlet showroom location on Granby Street. (Trevor Metcalfe/Staff)



Exposed bricks and ceiling beams are part of the identity of The Neon House, the new 12,000-square-foot private event space on Granby Street, said owner Marcy Telfer. (Courtesy photo)



The Neon House, a new event venue on Granby Street, includes two buildings with around 5,700 and 6,300 square feet of space, respectively. (Courtesy photo)

A new wedding and event space is set to open soon in Norfolk's Neon District. Called The Neon House, the 12,000-square-foot, two-building location features open floor plans, natural lighting and high ceilings. Business owners John and Marcy Telfer said they are betting the company will fill an unmet need for trendy wedding and event space in the Norfolk area.

"It has always been our dream, for at least 10 years, to really own our own venue," Marcy Telfer said.

Stone floors, exposed bricks and engraved columns greet visitors in the first building at 819 Granby Street. Along with the large 6,300-square-foot open space, the building features a smaller loft area on the second floor. Next door, an additional 5,700 or so feet of space is available in much the same style.

The Telfers, who also own Virginia Beach's Chef by Design Catering Company, said they jumped at the opportunity to fulfill a longtime goal of a permanent event space. For almost two decades, the company has offered catering from Richmond to the North Carolina line in venues like the Half Moone Cruise and Celebration Center and Chrysler Hall.

The pair said they are hoping to attract both wedding and corporate event clients at The Neon House. Marcy Telfer described the space as having an "modern industrial chic" atmosphere.

"I think there is a bride looking for a certain look that isn't being met, and this offers one more option for them to really have a different style or a different look," she said.

The Telfers said they signed on to lease the space after a previous tenant's plan for an event venue fell through. That plan would have added a stage and seating for around 200 people to 813 Granby St., according to planning documents submitted to the city. That space would have been zoned as a religious institution. While the Telfers don't share those plans, Marcy said churches are still welcome to rent out the space for services and events.

"This is a place we envision the city can come together," John Telfer said.

The pair said they were planning around \$100,000 worth of renovations to the buildings, including converting part of the loft to a bridal suite, complete with a dressing room and a kitchen. The back portion of 819 Granby St. will also become a kitchen and staging area for catering. They are also adding additional bathrooms to both buildings.

Apart from those small additions, Marcy Telfer said they aren't planning any huge structural changes.

"We're really letting it maintain the integrity of this building, because, again, it's so unique," she added "This is Norfolk."

The owners said they also envision hiring several additional staff members for the business — around 10-15 people in the short term, including event staff, managers and a sales team. Eventually, the Telfers said they hope to double the size of their catering company staff from 100 to 200 full-time and part-time positions.

Until a few months ago, the buildings were, respectively, a warehouse and a showroom for the regional furniture retailer Exotic Home Coastal Outlet. Owner Michael Day said he decided to lease out the Granby location so he could focus on the company's physical stores on Laskin Road in Virginia Beach and in Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina, saying both locations are very successful.

The Neon House owners said they plan to open the space by the second week of January. However, Marcy Telfer said Norfolk has granted the business special event permits to hold some activities in December.