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J.T. Commons has a 30 seat bar with televisions for sports viewing. PHOTOS BY GAIL CIAMPA/THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

J.T. Commons set to open in Middletown

Focaccia pizza, soft serve, shareable food on the menu

Gail Ciampa

Providence Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

Foccacia pizza, thin crust pizza, house-cut fries, chicken wings, Italian grinders and sandwiches, soft serve ice cream and sundaes are just a few of the comfort foods that will be on the menu when J.T. Commons opens on Monday, Oct. 6.

It's the new restaurant at 1037 Aquidneck Ave. in Middletown, and it comes from the Newport Restaurant Group. This is a new concept for the local chain, which offers dining options from Castle Hill and the Mooring in Newport to Iron Works in Warwick and Avvio's in Cranston.

J.T. Commons replaces Foodlove Market, which was an innovative and ambitious one-stop for prepared restaurant meals, local foods, cafe items and takeout. Though Foodlove was shuttered in January after a three-year run, its successes provided the basis for the new restaurant, said Jeff Tenner, the executive director of culinary for the Newport Restaurant Group.

The focaccia pizza at Foodlove was the inspiration for J.T. Commons, he said. It was one of the most popular dishes from chef Walter Slater's menu at Foodlove.

An exclusive tasting at the restaurant prior to opening reveals a menu full of fun foods offered with the excellence for which the Newport Restaurant Group is known.

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Salads, French Fries and spicy shrimp are some options on

ABOVE: The RI Red at J.T. Commons is a homage to Rhode Island's iconic pizza strips. The focaccia-style pizza is topped with red sauce and grated Parmesan.

Trump, Dems trade shutdown blame

Joey Garrison, Bart Jansen, Zac Anderson and Erin Mansfield

WASHINGTON – President Donald Trump and congressional Democrats traded blame after the federal government shut down at 12:01 a.m. ET on

The White House website featured a clock counting the amount of time "Democrats have shut down the gov-

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ernment," while the Democratic National Committee wrote on social media, "Republicans own this shutdown."

It marked the 15th government shut-

down since 1981.

There was no immediate end in sight to the bitter standoff over funding the government: Congressional Democrats demanded health care policy changes – including the reversal of Medicaid cuts – that Trump and Republicans refused to entertain.

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Limits for gifts doubled by vote

Public doesn't support ethics panel action

Katherine Gregg

Providence Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

PROVIDENCE – Despite zero public support, the Rhode Island Ethics Commission has approved an increase in the dollar value of the gifts that legislators and other public officials can accept from people who want something from them.

In a unanimous vote on Tuesday, Sept. 30, the commission voted to double the per-gift limit from \$25 to \$50 and the annual gift limit from any one "interested party" from \$75 to \$150, starting Jan. 1.

The decision followed a public comment period in which not a single person voiced support for the increase in person or in writing, with a number questioning why public officials should be allowed to accept any gifts from people who have a financial stake in their actions.

A "gift" could include: "Services, loans, rewards, promises of employment, favors, gratuities, or special discounts," and even loan forgiveness.

Who pushed for a higher gift limit? The nudge came from Senate Majority Leader Frank Ciccone, who, citing "inflation," introduced legislation earlier this year to allow a public official to accept even more than the Ethics Commission considered.

Senate Minority Leader Jessica de la Cruz was among the Republican and Democratic leaders who co-sponsored his bill (S927).

"Let me start with a simple question: Do Rhode Island public officials need to receive gifts from lobbyists or other interested persons in order to perform their public duties? I say they do not," former Rhode Island GOP National Committeeman Steve Frias wrote the Ethics Commission.

Frias found, when he did the math, that if every one of the roughly 605 registered lobbyists in the state gave the maximum proposed gift of \$150 to a lawmaker, that lawmakers – paid \$20,391 for serving – could receive an additional \$90,750 in "gifts" in a year.

"We oppose raising the limit because \$50 is beyond a small token of appreciation," John Marion, executive director of Common Cause Rhode Island, told the commission during the comment period.

"The only reason the Ethics Commission is even considering this is because a few legislators complained out of their own self-interest," he said.

"We should all remember the truth that exists in the old saw that there is no such thing as a free lunch. In our view a free lunch is using a public position for private gain," he said.

An incorrect assumption about reporting requirements

But the commission opted to adopt

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