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Thaw out at Fro's

For many, a night out warms up at stylish sushi bar

By Rachel Leibrock -- Bee Staff Writer

Coleah Brackett chats with Jay Osborn earlier this month at Tokyo Fro's Rockin' Sushi Bar.
Sacramento Bee/Florence Low

Sushi and dancing - who knew? The folks at Tokyo Fro's Rockin' Sushi Bar (2224 Fair Oaks Blvd.), that's who.



With both an extensive sushi menu and a growing reputation as the premier pre-weekend, pre-clubbin' hot spot, Tokyo Fro's has fast become one of Sacramento's worst-kept secrets.

Nestled in a shopping center at the corner of Howe Avenue and Fair Oaks Boulevard, Tokyo Fro's caters to a college-age crowd that's savvy enough to want something more interesting than just another bar.

And, starting next week, as the temperatures begin their slow, seasonal upswing, Tokyo Fro's is re-launching its popular Thursday-night courtyard party with live music and dancing. The party was introduced last summer, shortly after the restaurant's July 2002 debut.

Tokyo Fro's owner, Al Santa Catalina, says he "stumbled across" the idea after a nearby restaurant stopped its own Thursday-night jazz series.

"The Thursday-night crowd needed a place to hang out, and we kind of inherited them," Santa Catalina says. "This is the preliminary stop for nightclubbing -- it's a hybrid of food and ambience."

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The idea took off immediately, he says.

"It was a phenomenon -- we were fortunate to have a crowd right from the get-go," Santa Catalina says. "Sushi and dancing -- it really seems to work. It's just a different kind of niche. We just throw tradition right out the window."

It's certainly different -- in a good way. The spacious L-shaped room -- the roomy feeling is enhanced by a wall of huge picture windows -- sports a relaxed yet stylish milieu, with diners noshing on fresh sushi in the restaurant and revelers indulging in cocktails such as the Tok-tini and the Kosmo in the bar.

With sizable crowds and two large television monitors, the noise level can get a bit high -- it's definitely hard to hold a conversation. But hey, that's just part of the entertainment, right?

Right.

"It's a great, fun atmosphere," says Tracy Lee, co-founder of NapkinNights, a local Web site devoted to Sacramento's nightclub scene and a Tokyo Fro's regular. "The place gets packed and there's good music to listen to. It's just a great place to relax."

Lee says she and her friends often meet up at Tokyo Fro's as part of their clubbing warm-up. "We go there before heading out to the KBar or Blue Cue," she says.

For Stacey Pantages, 21, of Sacramento, it's an important addition to the local scene.

"This is something that Sacramento needs right now," Pantages says. "It's very different from a regular night of just going out. It's a good place to meet people and enjoy the hot summer nights."

OK, so maybe it's not exactly hot yet -- fickle April weather being what it is -- but you can still enjoy Tokyo Fro's Thursday-night shindig. Hours are 8 p.m. to midnight. This coming Thursday, check out the Originals, an old-school R&B funk band.

There's no cover charge, which just means all the more money to spend on the restaurant's moderately priced sushi (in the \$6-\$12 range). For more information: (916) 648-1115.

Retro-a-no-go

The rumors are true -- Polly-Esther's Culture Club (1696 Arden Way), the popular 1970s and '80s music-themed dance club, closed its doors for good a few weeks ago.

Despite the recent appearance of an ad in a local publication declaring that it was simply changing its format to R&B and hip-hop, "Night Life" has confirmed with The Danceplex, the New York-based company that owns the Polly Esther's chain of clubs, that its Sacramento days are over. A spokeswoman for Danceplex offered no explanation, saying only that "we are no longer in that space, it was time to close it." End of story -- at least for now.

Command performance

Command Collective, a local group of electronic musicians featuring, among others, Chachi Jones, hosts a show Saturday night at Espresso Metro (11th and K streets), with Park Avenue and Tycho. The all-ages show is \$4 and starts at 8:30 p.m. For more information: (916) 444-8129.



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Tokyo Fro's



THE SKINNY: A bustling sushi house with a full bar and, beginning next week, live music on Thursday evenings through the summer.

GET CONNECTED: Thursday nights will be the night at Tokyo Fro's. This is the place to hook up with friends before you start your pre-weekend club crawl. With its pretty, atmospheric courtyard, young, attractive crowd and a wide array of fresh sushi, you can't go wrong.

THE "IT" FACTOR: Tasty food, a very friendly, attentive and in-the-know wait staff, and great people-watching make Tokyo Fro's work on all levels.

About the Writer

Do you love the night life? If so, please share your tips, advice and suggestions regarding your favorite places to dance, hear live music or just enjoy the scene with The Bee's Rachel Leibrock at (916) 321-1176 or rleibrock@sacbee.com.

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