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Bearclaw grabs for Detroit's gourmet coffee customers

Louis Aguilar / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Here in this gourmet-coffee deprived city, a good cup of Bearclaw coffee for a nickel has become a media circus.

On a corner of Lafayette between First and Second streets, Bearclaw Coffee Co. has set up its mobile coffee unit -- a big orange van -- to sell coffee for 5 cents until 10 a.m. Tuesday. As of 7:30 a.m., there have been as many reporters as customers, all of whom are happy to talk to as long as they get their morning cup of joe.



"Ever since the Starbucks closed on Jefferson (Avenue), it's like, my God, where do you go around here?" said Daniella Martin, 37, referring to a former café across from Belle Isle. It's one of two Starbucks cafes that closed in recent weeks, leaving Detroit with fewer Starbucks than the airport.

Little wonder, reporters were circling the customers at the Bearclaw van. The van is parked across from its future permanent home, the Fort Shelby Doubletree Guest Suites, which is undergoing an \$82 million renovation.

Bearclaw is a Dexter-based chain. The Fort Shelby will be its first Detroit location. The Fort Shelby is slated to open in mid-December. Besides Bearclaw, Fort Shelby Doubletree will have more than 200 hotel rooms, a martini lounge, a Finn & Porter steakhouse, and 38,000 square feet of conference space.

The building also will include upscale apartments that may become condominiums. The original 10-story building opened in 1917 and was called the Hotel Fort Shelby, named after a British fort that once stood near the site. In 1927, a taller 21-story addition was added, designed by the famed architect Albert Kahn. The hotel's last tenant, a bar, left in 1998.

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