

# Business

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HIGH-END HANGOUT

## A 'country club for cigar smokers'

Tobacconist partners with Smith Party Rentals in opening new cigar lounge

By Richard Lee

The Tobacconist has been selling cigars for 40 years, and customers at the Greenwich store have always been able to find a leather chair to sneak a puff.

But soon they will have a new, more comfortable refuge to sample their purchases and share some conversation with fellow cigar aficionados.

Michael Cafagno, owner of the shop at 8 Havemeyer Place, is teaming with Michael Stelluti, owner of Smith Party Rentals on Mason Street in Greenwich, to open Davidoff Tobacconist and Cigar Lounge.

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Michael Cafagno

Cafagno, a purveyor of Davidoff cigars and accessories, won the Davidoff Golden Brand Best Performance Award in 2012, and he and Stelluti are teaming with the Switzerland-based company to operate the lounge, which measures more

than 2,000 square feet and is expected to open at 79 E. Putnam Ave. at the end of July.

The lounge, offering a conference center for members to conduct sessions, plays off the success of the Tobacconist, which was established by the late Jimmy Lacera in 1974, and the store will continue selling Davidoff and other cigar products.

"The store is a landmark in Greenwich. This (lounge) is an additional location. There's nothing like what we're building. We're building a high-end place. It's the largest independently owned Davidoff lounge in the world," Cafagno said. "Of the 229 stores, we're the largest Davidoff retailer in the U.S. We have a very good relationship with them. The majority of products will be Davidoff, but we'll be selling the other high-end brands."



Lindsay Perry/Staff photographer

Tobacconist of Greenwich co-owners Michael Stelluti, left, and Michael Cafagno stand in their store on Havemeyer Place in Greenwich. They will be opening another cigar lounge on East Putnam Avenue.

Because of Davidoff's close relationship with the Tobacconist, it's acquainted with Greenwich and its potential, according to Stelluti, who has known Cafagno for eight years.

"They know Greenwich was a perfect spot for the lounge. A Davidoff lounge has a certain look they want, so it's consistent with others around the world. A whole team flew in from Switzerland to assess the project," said Stelluti, a White Plains, N.Y., resident.

The goal is to make the lounge a "country club for cigar smokers," said Cafagno, a Greenwich resident.

"People have been ecstatic about it," he said, commenting that the lounge is offer-

ing a limited number of annual, lifetime and corporate memberships for use of the facilities. The lounge is open to the public for retail purchases.

Greenwich resident Paul Huston, who has been a Tobacconist customer for about seven years, already has purchased a membership.

"I'm very excited about it. I think Greenwich needs something like this for cigar aficionados," he said.

Ron Brien, principal of Alliance Properties, represented Cafagno and Stelluti in their search, and said the property is well-suited for the lounge.

"In part, they are responding to customers' wishes that want a place in which they can smoke cigars and socialize," he said. "It's a real winner concept and will be extremely popular. It will be a new destination in Greenwich for the cigar aficionado."

The Davidoff brand is well known and has a solid reputation, said Marcia O'Kane, executive director of the Greenwich Chamber of Commerce.

"That's a high-end product and stands well with Greenwich," she said. "Cigar lounges are rapidly becoming more popular, despite health warnings. I hope they do well."