

## First Street to see more closures

By Josh Stockinger  
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Thank God for the regulars.

That's been Jonji Gaffud's attitude since construction began last fall on the \$105 million First Street redevelopment project in downtown St. Charles.

Since then, getting to Gaffud's restaurant, Erik & Me, at 1 Illinois St. has been possible — but not always easy — as work to redevelop the surrounding six blocks got under way.

"One day this street's open; the next day it's closed and they open another one," Gaffud said Tuesday. Getting customers is "a tough sell sometimes. You can feel very smothered."

The good news is the landmark project, slated for completion in 2012, is moving along on schedule, officials say.

The not-so-good news is getting to several First Street businesses is likely to get more difficult before it gets any easier.

Starting today the intersection of Illinois and First streets will be closed to install a water main and sewer, and the Illinois Street bridge will be open to local traffic only.

Customers still will be able to get to Erik & Me and the other businesses in the Fox Island Square complex and the Blue Goose Super Market across the road. But they'll have to seek them out by crossing the Illinois Street bridge to the east or coming from Indiana Street to the west, then essentially turn around and go back the way they came to leave.

Ragamuffin Coffee House owner Troy Bristow already cut his weekly hours by about 30 in anticipation of the closure.

Bristow said Tuesday his business is surviving so far — but he acknowledged worrying about making it to 2012.

The latest setback was a construction-related gas line break in front of the coffee house last Friday. The incident shut down eight businesses for hours.

Still, "We're trying to stay positive," Bristow said. "I know (the project) is a beautiful vision as a whole for the community. It's just going to hurt a lot of people in the meantime."

The intersection of First and Illinois streets is expected to reopen in at least three weeks.

But other closures, including the Indiana Street bridge, are expected to follow as developers tear up the stretch and build condos, shops and offices over the next five years.

Aside from counting on the regulars, Gaffud and Bristow each said they hope customers don't forget they're there.

"Hopefully, they'll continue to weather the storm and come," Bristow said. "We don't just serve coffee here. We love being part of the community."