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Pita Pit cooks up plan for Dayton-area push

■ BY TOM DEMEROPOLIS
DBJ SENIOR REPORTER

A fast-casual dining franchise is looking to capitalize on the colleges in the Dayton region.

The Pita Pit, an Idaho-based franchise, is looking to open five locations in the Dayton area in the next 12 to 18 months.

The development team has started looking for retail locations and meeting with existing Ohio franchisees and potential franchisees to operate the new locations.

Corey Bowman, vice president of franchise development for Pita Pit, said the company has seen success at other Ohio colleges, such as Ohio University and Kent State University, and it made sense to target Dayton next. With multiple colleges in the region, Bowman said as many as eight stores could open in the Dayton market.

Pita Pit has centered on college towns, with the nearest location in Oxford near Miami University's campus. Similar in concept to Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc.'s stores, customers choose the pita, then the fillings — such as gyro meat or a club — and toppings and sauces.

The stores are generally between 1,000

and 1,500 square feet and employ 15 to 25 part-time workers.

Pita Pit, which has 180 locations in the United States today, is on pace to open at least 25 locations this year.

Bowman said the economy has become a factor in scouting for more locations. During a down period, more people look for franchise opportunities because they want to be in control of their job.

Ray Wiley, co-founder of Kettering-based Hothead Burritos, said historically recessions are good for franchisors, but this recession has been different. The passage of the health care law and the lack of credit has hampered many people's abilities to become a Hot Head franchisee. The fast-casual burrito joint started franchising in 2009.

The initial fee for a Pita Pit franchise is about \$220,000 on average, with 6 percent annual royalty fees.

Bowman said it's possible the first Pita Pit in Dayton could open before the end of the year.



Ray Wiley

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