



Coeur d'Alene Pita Pit reopens

By RICK THOMAS
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COEUR d'ALENE — Most successful businesses don't shut down after less than two years of operation, but in that time period Pita Pit has proven to be anything but ordinary.

The Pita Pit at 320 Sherman Ave. reopens at 8 a.m. today after more than two months of remodeling.

"It was quite a project," said Jack Riggs, chief executive officer of Pita Pit USA, which is based in offices across the street.

Riggs and a team of investors bought the U.S. rights to the franchise in April 2005 and opened the Coeur d'Alene restaurant that June.

Though it has since then been the training center for franchisees, the rapid expansion of the company created the need to upgrade their training facility.

"When we opened two summers ago, the focus was on the front half," Riggs said. "The back was the old original restaurant. It was too small and not adequate."

So even though they had completely gutted the building to make it into a Pita Pit, they started again in January to expand the training facility. One thing led to another, however, and the front end also got a makeover.

"We've been developing an alternate decor package," said Jack's son, Peter Riggs, vice president of corporate development. "We were primarily marketing to college areas, but we're moving to more professional, mall-type settings."

While the restaurant layout remains the same, new colors and earth-tone tiles were installed to try out the new look.

That allows them to get plenty of feedback, Jack said, and test new equipment such as the chrome grill installed up front.

"If we're going to try something, we're going to try it here," he said.

The back half of the facility was totally changed, with new restrooms moved toward the front, allowing an expanded conference room where up to eight franchisees and their employees can undergo the 10-day Pita Pit training program.

They also added a secondary grill at the very back, which will be used to prepare delivery orders, handle heavy sales periods and serve as a training area.

"The first time they roll a pita, they might not want to be out front," Jack said.

With that grill right by the back door, it's especially easy to get delivery orders out, Peter said. With their purchase of the Hayden Pita Pit, and a franchise in Post Falls, the area is well served with delivery service, he said, and with a minimum order of only \$10 it has proven to be a popular choice.

With 124 locations in 38 states and 55 more in development throughout the U.S., Pita Pit is becoming one of the fastest-growing franchises in the country, Jack said.

"We opened three in the past two days," he said on Thursday.

Between the two company-owned stores there are 30 to 40 employees, and with the expansion has come opportunity. Jason Cowan is the new general manager of the Coeur d'Alene store, with prior manager Scott Hazlett moving to business development selling franchises.

The corporate staff has grown from two in a tiny basement office to 14 taking a suite of offices in the Wiggett Building, Jack said.

The renovations cost at least \$100,000, he said, but the Coeur d'Alene operation is a showcase for the company.

"We want to show our franchisees what a well-run store can do," Peter said.