

Chick-fil-A finds the Kansas City market delicious, plans more restaurants

By Suzanna Stagemeier
Staff Writer

CHICK-FIL- HAS BEEN SMACKING ITS LIPS ABOUT the Kansas City market, in which it quickly has developed a foothold, and this week brought company President Dan Cathy to town.

The next local restaurant — a 4,600-square-foot location at the Plaza at the Speedway, 10770 Parallel Parkway, Kansas City, Kan. — is set to start construction in early April and open in August, bringing about 65 new jobs and adding to six free-standing restaurants developed in the area during about the past five years. Chick-fil-A also is opening a location in St. Joseph in June.

“We’ve passed by a lot of other opportunities in California, New York, Detroit, Portland, Seattle — we’ve bypassed those in order to continue to grow here,” Cathy, who will visit five markets this year, said Monday. “We’re very bullish on this economy. Our restaurants have performed incredibly well here.”

Last year, the Atlanta-based quick-service chain

reported a record \$3.22 billion in sales — its 42nd consecutive year of sales growth but first time passing \$3 billion — with sales increasing 8.6 percent from 2008. In stores that had been open at least a year, sales rose 2.52 percent from 2008,

something that has been difficult for many restaurant chains in the current environment.

The privately held company is “very, very careful” about where it invests, Cathy said. But the Kansas City market combines a relatively healthy economy, high-traffic retailers, a pro-business environment and a broad base of industries. He said it also boasts stable values, a spirit of community and a high-performing labor force

of young people who have good work ethics and personal discipline.

“We could easily double our size here and not overbuild the market,” Cathy said.

Continued growth of the market could accommodate at least one new Chick-fil-A a year, he said.

Part of the chain’s appeal is its \$6 price point, which seems to resonate with consumers who have been trading visits to finer restaurants for less expensive options. It also offers special service, Cathy said.

This year, Chick-fil-A plans to open almost 70 new stand-alone locations — the same as last year — and create more than 4,600 jobs. All of this year’s locations will be in existing markets except Chicago, which will get its first two Chick-fil-A restaurants in the second half of the year.

While in Kansas City, Cathy spoke at The Central Exchange on Monday. Scheduled engagements during the three-day visit also included the greater Kansas City chapter of the Public Relations Society of America, several churches and faith groups, Hallmark Cards Inc., Rockhurst University and Shawnee Mission West High School.

Cathy mentioned a philosophy that “the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”

“The main thing at Chick-fil-A is a focus on people and to acknowledge God in our business,” he said.

Chick-fil-A, formed in 1967, has more than 1,480 restaurants in 38 states and Washington. It’s credited with inventing the boneless chicken breast sandwich and introducing the chicken nugget concept, the company said.

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