



## T-REX | Village West's dino-mite attraction opens Tuesday



PHOTOS BY KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

With the opening of T-Rex a week away, Ramiro Hernandez on Tuesday put the finishing touches on a baby T-Rex, one of many dinosaur replicas in the restaurant at The Legends.

# Colossus lands at Legends

**Backers gamble that the prehistoric-themed restaurant won't go the way of the dinosaur.**

By JOYCE SMITH and MARK WIEBE  
The Kansas City Star

Four-year-old Zachary Adams of Lee's Summit threw back his head to take in the 45-foot-high, 125-foot-long Argentinosaurus, one of the largest dinosaurs to walk the earth.

"It's humongous," Zachary said, his eyes wide in wonder at the dinosaur bones arched over the doorway of the new T-Rex attraction that has taken shape over the last few months in Kansas City, Kan.

And that was just the entrance.

Handprints of all sizes dotted the windows of the "prehistoric



**"People will come once for the 'wow' factor, but they will come back for the great food and quality service," says Steve Schussler.**

family adventure" as adults and children alike tried to sneak a peek at the animatronic dinosaurs and other features before it opens Tuesday. At \$15 million, T-Rex will be the Kansas City area's most expensive themed restaurant, besting the \$8 million Rainforest Cafe in Overland Park.

Thanks to the "enormous welcoming mat" put out by the city, The Legends beat out other tourist destinations to get the first of nine planned T-Rex locations nationwide.

"I wasn't convinced at the beginning that I wanted to be in the city, and I was told not to be a snob," said Steve Schussler, the founder of T-Rex and a partner in the restaurant.

SEE T-REX | A4



KEITH MYERS | THE KANSAS CITY STAR

A giant animatronic octopus looms over the Shark Bar at T-Rex, the latest addition to The Legends shopping and entertainment center in Kansas City, Kan. At \$15 million, T-Rex will be the Kansas City area's most expensive themed restaurant.

## T-REX: STAR bonds aided project

FROM A1

"But I obviously did my research on the developer, on billboard laws, sales at other area restaurants, which were No. 1 for some chains, the demographics, the draw of center. The parking lot at Cabela's was crowded with cars that had come from a 300-mile radius," Schussler said.

Make no mistake: Schussler also chose Kansas City, Kan., to introduce his concept because he was offered \$8.5 million in sales tax revenue bonds to help build the dinosaurs and other restaurant attractions. That is a small percentage of the roughly \$265 million in STAR bonds that are helping to finance Village West, but it is a hefty sum for a single restaurant.

Carol Marinovich said she had no regrets about offering the incentives when she was mayor of the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kan.

"I felt we needed to do what we needed to do to get this here," she said.

T-Rex, which is set to open at 4 p.m. Tuesday, will take customers back to a time before humans walked the earth with its animatronic dinosaurs amid cascading waterfalls, ice caves, bubbling geysers, and sounds of roaring dinosaurs.

"People will come once for the 'wow' factor, but they will

### Inside T-Rex

■ There is the Ice Age Room with its woolly mammoth and theatrical snow, and the Geo Tech Room, where customers can dine in the belly of a triceratops near a "lava" flow.

■ A giant animatronic octopus sits atop the Shark Bar over a 5,000-gallon shark tank. Flames shoot from all sides of the Kitchen of Fire's brick pizza oven.

■ Would-be paleontologists can practice their skills at the Discovery Dig, a large sand pit with replicas of fossil bones that can be uncovered.

■ In partnership with T-Rex, St. Louis-based Build-A-Bear Workshop Inc. will open its first Build-A-Dino store at the site.

come back for the great food and quality service," said Schussler, the president and chief executive officer of Schussler Creative Inc. in Golden Valley, Minn.

That was a critical concern because in recent years some theme restaurants have struggled because they offered too much flash in the decor and not enough substance in the food.

Some concepts have thrived. Rank Group PLC's Hard Rock Cafe, for example, has 120 restaurants and hotel-casinos worldwide. Planet Hollywood went through bankruptcy — twice.

New ideas keep coming. For example, the Cordish Co., developers of downtown Kansas City's Power & Light District, have agreed with NASCAR to develop and operate a line of stock-car-racing-themed res-

taurant and entertainment venues called NASCAR Sports Grille.

Believers also include Landry's Restaurants Inc., which recently became an 80 percent partner in T-Rex. The company, which previously purchased Rainforest Cafe from Schussler, has worked on an extensive menu for T-Rex that offers such items as Mastodon Margaritas, Mammoth Mushroom Raviolis and Macadamia Nut Crusted Snapper.

Themed restaurants tend to do better in tourist areas that bring in a stream of new customers. The Legends, a 750,000-square-foot outdoor shopping and entertainment lifestyle center at Interstate 435 and State Avenue, is expected to draw 12 million to 15 million visitors a year.

Tilman Fertitta, the president, chairman and chief exec-

utive officer of Landry's, said T-Rex will be very successful if it averages 1,000 visitors a day.

"There are very high numbers being done at the Legends, and we think in years to come that area will continue to grow," he said.

T-Rex originally was scheduled to open in April, but the owners did not want to rush it and went \$5 million over budget. For example, Schussler said, an "ugly" version of the giant jellyfish was replaced with a prettier one fit for couples or a 4-year-old's birthday party.

"It would be easier to live with it and say we will do it better next time," Schussler said. "But you have to spend a lot of money to get a return on your investment. And we owe Kansas City a first-class, world-class project."

Mayor Joe Reardon said that having Schussler behind the restaurant will further increase Village West's and the city's profile.

"For his first new themed restaurant after Rainforest Cafe to open in Kansas City, Kansas, is very special," he said. "And I think we'll receive some national attention for that."

To reach Joyce Smith, call (816) 234-4692 or send e-mail to [jsmith@kcstar.com](mailto:jsmith@kcstar.com).

To reach Mark Wiebe, call (816) 234-5995 or send e-mail to [mwiebe@kcstar.com](mailto:mwiebe@kcstar.com).