

## Rainforest Cafe creator, Landry's debut T-Rex family concept in Kan.

By Ron Ruggless

KANSAS CITY, KAN. — As the nearly \$1.14 billion-a-year Landry's Restaurants Inc. is eyeing spinoffs of two chains in its vast brand portfolio, the company has unleashed T-Rex, a 375-seat, \$15 million dinosaur-theme concept by the creator of the Landry's-owned Rainforest Cafe chain.

The 20,000-square-foot T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure opened June 25 in The Legends shopping center, just blocks from Kansas City's popular NASCAR speedway, as a joint venture of

Houston-based Landry's and Schussler Creative Inc. of Golden Valley, Minn.

The restaurant, which boasts animated dinosaurs and a mock fossil dig as well as retail space, is 80-percent owned by Landry's, with the balance held by Schussler Creative, the company headed by Rainforest Cafe originator Steven Schussler.

Tilman Fertitta, chairman, chief executive and president of Landry's, said the companies expect the new concept to generate

an \$18 to \$19 per-person check average. Annual sales were not forecast, but Rainforest Cafe units, by comparison, are estimated to average nearly \$8.3 million.

The opening of a second T-Rex is planned for early 2008 at the Downtown Disney Marketplace, near Orlando, Fla.

"After great success with Rainforest across the U.S. and the world, to have a new concept like T-Rex to develop, and to have the first one in Kansas is so special."

(See *RAINFOREST*, page 99)



The first T-Rex unit opened recently in Kansas City, Kan. The dinosaur-themed concept is a joint venture of Landry's Restaurants and Schussler Creative Inc. From left: Steven Schussler of Schussler Creative; Joe Reardon, mayor of Kansas City, Kan.; and Tilman Fertitta, chairman, president and chief executive of Landry's

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(Continued from page 4)

Fertitta said. "Dinosaurs are great. We're going to have a lot of fun with it in the years to come."

Landry's Restaurants in late February acquired its majority stake in T-Rex for about \$7.6 million. That price included reimbursements to Schussler Creative for research and development, construction draws and reopening expenses. Under the agreement, Landry's has the option of acquiring Schussler Creative's 20-percent interest for up to \$35 million.

"Steve and I got together seven years ago, when we were fortunate enough to buy the Rainforest concept," Fertitta said, and "[we] built a relationship through that acquisition." He added: "Rainforest has been very, very good for Landry's. Here we are today, together again. Partnerships have to have something special, and Steve created, financed, built and knows how to run it."

The Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kan., contributed about \$11 million to the T-Rex project in a public-private partnership, Schussler said.

"The city, the county, the state and the federal governments, through a consortium, provided tax incentives for development," Schussler explained. "It's a way for government to increase tax revenues. They all pushed for T-Rex to be here."

Joe Reardon, mayor of Kansas City, said: "It's a T-Rex-cellent day in Kansas City, Kan. On behalf of the Unified Government, I want to welcome such a great partner to our community."

"What strikes me most about T-Rex," Reardon continued, "comes from [someone] who created a phenomenon with Rainforest Cafe ... and the [significance for] Kansas City is this: What kid has not been to Rainforest Cafe? What kid isn't going to want to come to T-Rex?

This is a world-class venue."

The mayor predicted the restaurant would be a "crowning jewel" of visitors' experience in Kansas City.

The two-story restaurant includes bubbling geysers, animated woolly mammoths and themes built around fire, water and ice.

The menu includes "Triassic Tortellini" to "Bronto Burgers," and such desserts as "Chocolate Extinction" and "Build-Your-Own Smores."

T-Rex operates within Landry's Rainforest division. "We see it as an extension of Rainforest Cafe," Fertitta said. "The Rainforest team is overseeing it. The concepts are different, but they operate similarly."

Landry's, which last month said it was exploring "strategic alternatives" for its Joe's Crab Shack and Saltgrass Steak House chains, indicated that T-Rex could be an addition to its two Golden

Nugget resort-casino locations.

"In the right casino property, one of these would do great in Las Vegas or another high-density gaming area," Fertitta said, adding that he expects T-Rex's retail sales to be high. "We do a tremendous amount of retail sales in our Rainforests. I personally think that dinosaurs are more unique than the Rainforest animals, so I expect we will be doing more."

The new restaurant includes an outlet of the Build-A-Bear Workshop chain, a feature in many shopping malls nationwide, though the T-Rex branch bears a new trademarked variation called "Build-A-Dino." Schussler called the addition of the make-your-own-stuffed-animal shop "a great match for the demographic profile."

Fertitta and Schussler said the deal with the Disney organization for the second T-Rex unit limits the number of the chain's locations to nine in the United States and 10

abroad. "It's a deal we agreed to with Disney because they want to keep it unique and fresh," Schussler explained. "It's very important that we are able to work with the communities with tourism [and] with city leaders who welcome us."

Fertitta said other prospective T-Rex sites are under active consideration, but he would not give details. "We think this is a unique concept," he said. "We will continue to tweak this prototype, and I think the next one you see will be even better than this one."

Schussler added that Landry's had "taken on the incredible responsibility, giving them another platform to entertain, educate and serve phenomenal food to the public. People will come once for the 'wow factor,' but they'll come back for good, quality food and service." ■

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