

The Piper Press – Kansas City, Kansas



Backfire Barbecue ...

The new Backfire Barbecue and Orange County Choppers restaurant is in the works and will open this fall at The Legends, near Jazz restaurant and Cavender's. (Staff photo)

Backfire Barbecue restaurant coming to Legends

August 20, 2009
by Mary Rupert

The same creative genius that produced the remarkable T-Rex restaurant is working on the new Backfire Barbecue opening this fall at The Legends.

Backfire Barbecue with Orange County Choppers is the newest work of Steve Schussler of Schussler Creative. The 8,300-square-foot restaurant will open in mid-November next to the Jazz restaurant and near Cavender's at The Legends. It will be the first of several Backfire Barbecues to be built throughout the nation, Schussler said.

"The plan is to take it around the world, with Kansas City first," he said. Fewer than 10 are planned, in all.

Visitors can expect to see décor involving custom motorcycles created for the restaurant, raised in an array of neon, and water fountains, he said. There will be antique cars on display, a NASCAR room, a live stage, and a retail area. The atmosphere promises to be high-energy and lively.

The new restaurant uses a motorcycle theme based on a popular show, "Orange County Choppers," on TLC Cable. About three times a year, stars from the show are expected to make appearances at the restaurant. Schussler said he hopes to appeal to a wider audience, too.

"We want to make it a local gathering place for three to four generations of people," he said. It will appeal to all ages and to families, he added.

"We know Orange County can be edgy," he said. "We're going to have some Schussler Creative surprises – like a

s'mores pit.”

He said he’s experimented with the outdoor s’mores pit, in product testing, and it has proved a “huge success” with potential visitors. S’mores are a snack made of graham crackers, melted chocolate and marshmallows, popular with campers.

“We’ve been in research and development for over three years,” Schussler said.

Product testing has been an important part of his concept, he said. Different features of the restaurant have been tested on audiences. Building a brand is a long process that involves testing in many areas, he said.

Like other Schussler projects, special attention has been given to many details of the project.

“It’s so much more involved, so intense, so well-thought out, even the music is thought out,” he said.

Recently, Schussler was at the site trying to determine if there would be enough air conditioning in areas of the restaurant that receive a lot of sunlight. The detail-oriented planning even includes the restrooms, where water faucets may take the shape of motorcycle parts.

Helmut Lange, senior vice president of retail for Schussler Creative, said motorcycle and car-oriented items, as well as T-shirts and accessories, will be available for purchase at the restaurant’s gift shop. He said children will be able to create their own custom motorcycle designs at a computer, and then print out the completed version for a souvenir.

The menu at Backfire Barbecue will include a build-your-own burger option, using Angus beef, according to Carol Daniel, regional vice president of restaurant operations for Levy Restaurants. The restaurant’s own barbecue sauce is now under development, she said.

The restaurant will use a smoker to produce barbecued items, and also on the menu will be barbecue and classic favorites, homemade meat loaf, filet steaks, barbecued chicken, macaroni and cheese, fresh market greens, cobblers, skillet desserts and more, she said.

She said Backfire Barbecue will be a fun place to go and has been fun to work on.

Schussler said he has been impressed with how well businesses are doing at The Legends and the construction in nearby developments such as Plaza at the Speedway.

The \$800-square-foot cost to build the new Backfire Barbecue “represents confidence” in the market, restaurant and community, he said. Schussler Creative is a strategic and financial partner with RED Development, which is not very common for a developer, he said. It has been a key to the success of Schussler and to the brand, he said.

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