

Tonawanda News

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A look at what national chains might come to Western New York

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CNHI

NORTH TONAWANDA — While local mom-and-pop stores are what give most towns their unique flavor, chains also serve an essential function in the world of commerce.

Like it or not, chain restaurants and stores sometimes offer items that just can't be had at local businesses. And rarely will a corner pizzeria be the key draw for a tourist.

Plus, if we have to see commercials for all of these places on television, why shouldn't we be able to patronize them?

While Western New York has its fair share of chains, there are people who would like to see others move into the region. Acting upon the requests of readers, representatives of a handful of national chain restaurants and grocery stores were contacted regarding the likelihood of their businesses expanding into the Buffalo-Niagara region.

Not responding to e-mail requests were Bojangles' Famous Chicken 'n Biscuits, Joe's Crab Shack, Jack in the Box and Sonic. Following are the responses of those who wrote or called back.

Chick-fil-A

WHAT IT IS: Southern-style chicken eatery.

LOCATIONS: More than 1,600, the closest of which is in Erie, Pa.

PROGNOSIS: Negative. "At this time, our records do not indicate development plans for a Chick-fil-A restaurant in your requested area," wrote a public relations representative only identified as Jay. "Although we would like to accommodate all location requests, our Chick-fil-A restaurant new opening locations are determined through market research and analysis. Currently, our focus for expansion includes southern California and the Chicago market. We hope to add additional markets for expansion in the next five years."

P.S. All locations are closed Sundays.

Dinosaur Bar-B-Que

WHAT IT IS: Old-fashioned barbecue joint.

LOCATIONS: Three, the closest of which is in Rochester.

PROGNOSIS: Hopeful. Dinosaur Bar-B-Que, which owns all of its locations on the corporate level, is interested in Western New York.

“We do like Buffalo and recently have looked around but have yet to find the right location,” wrote company spokesman John Stage.

P.S. Tops Markets and some other grocers carry frozen Dinosaur Bar-B-Que foods.

Golden Corral

WHAT IT IS: Buffet eatery that offers steak nights, crab leg nights and other specialties.

LOCATIONS: Nearly 500, the closest of which is in Erie, Pa.

PROGNOSIS: Promising. Company officials have been delving into the Buffalo-Niagara market for nearly a decade trying to find the right fit to establish a corporate-operated restaurant, said Dick Chase, the company’s vice president of development.

“We were thinking about near the Galleria Mall (in Cheektowaga), but we could not come to terms with the seller of the property,” he said in a phone interview.

There isn’t an active development plan now, Chase said, but a Golden Corral broker is looking for an appropriate site in the region.

“We do like Buffalo,” he said. “We do think that our concept would be extremely well-received ... but we’re not putting our feet on the ground right now.”

P.S. Golden Corral used to operate locally several years ago in Clarence, but the Transit Road location closed in 1999 due to a lack of business.

IKEA

WHAT IT IS: Designs and sells home decor products.

LOCATIONS: About 267 worldwide, the closest of which is in Burlington, Ontario.

PROGNOSIS: Negative, according to ikeafans.com, a website devoted to IKEA lovers. The site reported that Buffalo is one of the three markets nationwide most enamored with bringing in an IKEA, but that Buffalo is too small a market for the chain (which prefers markets of at least 2 million people). Factoring in Syracuse and Rochester would meet that need, but the company said that a Buffalo-Rochester-Syracuse is too spread out.

P.S. IKEA stands for “Ingvar Kamprad Elmtaryd Agunnaryd” in Dutch; Ingvar Kamprad is the

name of the company founder, while Elmtaryd is the farm he grew up on and Agunnaryd is his home parish (county).

Maggiano's Little Italy

WHAT IT IS: Gluttonous family-style Italian food, served all you can eat.

LOCATIONS: 41 nationwide, the closest of which is in Beachwood, Ohio, near Cleveland.

PROGNOSIS: Negative. "Presently, we are not entertaining any current franchise opportunities with Maggiano's," wrote guest relations representative Joy Shepard.

P.S. The chain is only 19 years old.

Trader Joe's

WHAT IT IS: A chain of specialty grocery stores that offers environmentally friendly items.

LOCATIONS: 344 stores in 25 states, the closest of which is in Woodmere, Ohio

PROGNOSIS: Negative. "At this time, it's not in our tier of plan to open a location in Buffalo," said Alison Mochizuki, the chain's public relations director.

P.S. Trader Joe's is owned by the family of German businessman Theo Albrecht, one of the two brothers who founded the Aldi chain.

Whole Foods Market

WHAT IT IS: A natural/organic grocer.

LOCATIONS: 279 stores in North America, the closest of which is in Oakville, Ontario.

PROGNOSIS: Negative. "Currently there are no formal plans in the works for a store in the Buffalo area. However, we're always open to reviewing opportunities for new locations," wrote spokesman Michael Sinatra.

P.S. The company eliminated the use of plastic bags in 2008.

Wings to Go

WHAT IT IS: A chain of chicken wing eateries.

LOCATIONS: About 80, the closest of which is in eastern Pennsylvania.

PROGNOSIS: Upbeat, based on the words of Russ Clarke, the company's director of marketing. Although not contacted specifically for this story, Clarke said when interviewed for another story that Wings to Go would love to have a presence in the wing's home region.

“Our big goal is we would love to see someone in the Buffalo area want to become a franchisee,” he said during a phone interview.

P.S. The company was started by two Buffalo natives, Chris Tisack and Sally Mayhew, who were stationed together at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware.