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Work on North Tarrant Express hasn't starved cities' restaurant business

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BEDFORD -- Two things kept Cheddar's Casual Café in town despite the dust and detours delivered by a highway expansion project, said Chef Robert Pesch.

"This restaurant has been a landmark here since 1981, and we have a commitment to the community," he said. "The loyal guests we have deserve our best."

Razzoo's and Mexican Inn left Bedford because their buildings were devoured by the massive North Tarrant Express reconstruction project. But wherever they could, restaurants along the 13.5-mile project dug in and held on. They're being joined by new diners as -- halfway through the five-year construction -- the commercial areas along Northeast Loop 820 and Airport Freeway begin to recover.

Hurst lost a Burger King, but became home to In-N-Out Burger.

The nationally known icon took an Airport Freeway frontage road slot just east of Precinct Line Road. It will be joined by a Golden Chick, as well as a concept restaurant to be announced soon by the Mexican Inn company, said the city's economic development director, Steve Bowden.

Other new restaurants in Hurst include Jimmy John's, Del Taco, Asian King Buffet, Wittens Grill and Sports Pub, and Red Panda Wok and Grill.

Coming soon will be a Pei Wei Asian Diner and Potbelly Sandwich Shop on Precinct Line, south of Airport Freeway, and Outback Steakhouse will relocate a couple of blocks to the west -- remaining open at 701 Airport Freeway until the new building's finished where Albertson's used to be.

Starbucks left town for a while, but will soon return in a larger, freestanding building on Precinct Line.

North Richland Hills lost none of its restaurants to the project, said city spokeswoman Kristin James.

But a new Taco Cabana opened on the southeast corner of Rufe Snow Drive and Northeast Loop 820 in March.

New DQ in Euless

Euless, which lost an OC Burger but saw Whataburger rebuild on Airport Freeway, is getting a Texas burger legend when Dairy Queen opens on North Industrial Boulevard. The new DQ opens Tuesday.

"Euless has a long history with Dairy Queen," said franchise owner Michael Clarke. "There used to be three here. Two were converted to other restaurants -- Verna's on Texas 10 and the Burger Box on Industrial. The other one was torn down."

That Burger Box, by the way, is being remodeled and should reopen soon.

More than 25 locations in Northeast Tarrant County were considered before Euless was chosen as the inaugural site of an urban DQ resurgence, Clarke said.

The Euless Dairy Queen represents a seven-figure investment on which Clarke and his associates are hanging hopes for sustained profitability over a minimum 20-year period.

But "most importantly, in Euless I found a community where there was a genuine love and desire for the DQ brand," he said.

The next one should be in Fort Worth, opening this fall at Beach Street and North Tarrant Parkway. The goal is to build multiple Dairy Queen locations in Northeast Tarrant County, Clarke said.

"I'll let the customers decide when there are too many," he said.

Other restaurants lured by the promise of prosperity in Euless include Bayou Twist on South Ector Drive, Wok Express on South Industrial Boulevard, Philly Steak and Deli on West Euless Boulevard, Chipotle Mexican Grill and Rosa's Café on Texas 121, and Texas Kitchen on North Main Street.

Bedford is booming

With its recent grand reopening, the Bedford Cheddar's became the oldest of the chain's stores and possibly the town's oldest restaurant. The company spent a lot of money not only on substantially remodeling the restaurant at 1937 Airport Freeway, but also to buy property next door to replace parking spaces lost to the highway expansion, said company spokesman Avid Noble.

"We stayed open the whole time, doing construction in the evening," he said. "It took us 14 weeks, working six nights per week, to complete the project."

Bill Syblon, Bedford's development director, said the city is fortunate to have great relationships with its restaurants and their owners.

The Jason's Deli on Airport Freeway has been expanded, and Applebee's built a restaurant just east of Central Drive, Syblon said. Chili's popped up across the freeway next to Pappadeaux Seafood Kitchen.

Syblon said he never would have guessed when the project started 2 1/2 years ago that the city would have so much momentum and be so far ahead at this point in the highway expansion.

This article includes material from the Star-Telegram archives.

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