

Hooters opens on State Line

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Staff photo by Robb Pittard Tommy Van Stanton, 3, from Cass, Texas, left, gets a balloon from "Hooters girls" Faye Ward, center, and Charlise Stiles during the official grand opening of the newest eating establishment in Texarkana.

Texas Wings Inc. officially opened its Hooters restaurant in Texarkana Thursday, bringing another eatery and entertainment option to State Line Avenue and the Interstate 30 corridor. With fanfare and energy, new customers were welcomed by the "Hooters girls," as they're known, when the restaurant opened. About 15 minutes before customers came in, the spirited Hooters waitresses were practicing their songs and gearing up for the shift, as were the cooks in the kitchen. "Right now we're in what's called jump start," said Heather Suggitt, the Houston regional marketing manager for Texas Wings Inc., about prepping for the day. Suggitt said when a Hooters opens, the trainers and "jump starters" from other restaurants are brought in to help the newer waitresses get used to the Hooters scene.

"These are our standout girls," she said. Generally, she said, the Hooters waitresses are your "all-American girl, the cheerleader, the surfer girl, the girl next door." Hostesses must be 17 years old, while Hooters waitresses must be 18. Texas Wings hired about 65 local waitresses and 15 hostesses. With other staff included, that is more than 100 new jobs, Suggitt said.

In the middle of the restaurant, she points out a unique aspect of being near the state line: tables in the shapes of Arkansas and Texas. She said the whole area has welcomed the new restaurant, which has added to the excitement. The restaurant has 37 tables plus the bar area, in addition to the standard Hooters color motif, flat-screen TVs and photos of celebrities arm-in-arm with Hooters waitresses. "Thirty-three percent of what we sell are chicken wings," said Suggitt. Other items on the Hooters menu include the ever-popular buffalo chicken sandwich, salads, burgers and seafood.

"We also have T-shirts and they're all logoed with Texarkana," she said. Earlier in the week, the restaurant had a soft opening. Thursday's occasion of opening to the public was marked by a ribbon cutting. Texarkana, Texas, Mayor James Bramlett, noting this corner near I-30 and State Line had become an eyesore in Texarkana for a number of years, said the city appreciates the "investment in Texarkana, USA."

Billy Bennett, general manager at the Hooters restaurant here, said a lot of work went into transforming the building from a Western Sizzlin' to a Hooters restaurant. "I don't think we could open a store in a better place," he said about being in Texarkana. NAI American Realty Co. sold the 5101 N. State Line Ave. building to Hooters, and Jerry Brewer of NAI said this area is the front door to town. He said they're "just glad to have somebody in here" to occupy a formerly empty building.

Suggitt said after Hooters first opened in 1983 the company concentrated on big cities as Hooters grew larger. Now there are more than 400 Hooters restaurants. "As time went by, it made sense to branch out a little," she said, noting they're aware that franchises have seen record sales when they've come to Texarkana. She said Texas Wings plans to open about four Hooters restaurants a year in Texas.