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Chick-Fil-A going up at College, Horsetooth

BY PAT FERRIER

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Get out of the water, fish; there's a chicken that needs a place to roost.

Construction crews today are razing the last vestiges of Nate's seafood restaurant to make way for Chick-Fil-A in Fort Collins Marketplace at the southwest corner of Horsetooth Road and College Avenue.

Poudre Fire Authority has been using the site for search and rescue training.

The location has been vacant since September 2006, when Wildfish - Nate's reincarnate - closed its doors.

A new 4,195-square-foot Chick-Fil-A will soon rise from the rubble, bringing with it 60 new jobs.

It will join the Chick-Fil-A at Foothills Mall as the second location in the city.

Franchisee Stevan Stein said the mall store will remain open, catering to a captive audience at the mall.

The mall "has a pretty distinct customer base because of the mall traffic," Stein said.

"The freestanding store was borne out of customers' requests for more convenient locations and the ability to go through a drive-through," he said.

By the end of the summer, Stein expects to give up his mall franchise for the freestanding store.

"The visibility is greatly enhanced with (the Horsetooth/College) location. We couldn't have asked for a better location," Stein said.

The intersection is the third busiest in the city behind College Avenue and Drake Road and College Avenue and Prospect Road, with more than 70,000 cars passing by every day, according to city records.

The new Chick-Fil-A is part of Marketplace owner NewMark Merrill Mountain States' attempt to build on the momentum of recent upgrades such as fresh landscaping, parking lot upgrades, outdoor music, promotional events and new signage.

NewMark Merrill, which owns 43 shopping centers in Colorado, California and Illinois, bought the marketplace, anchored by Albertsons and Famous Footwear, in 2006 for \$9.2 million.

Construction on Chick-Fil-A is expected to begin June 22 and be wrapped up by the fall, said Luke McFetridge, an associate with NewMark Merrill Mountain States.

Stein expects an early October opening, and he is already accepting job applications at the mall store.

"I'm excited about getting to create 60 new jobs and provide some business for local and regional vendors by being open."

Stein said many people look at his restaurant as a chain "but don't realize the franchisees are local. I live here, my kids go to school here, we worship here ... I'm not an absentee franchisee. I'm proud that we have supported a lot of different things in the community such as schools, churches, the MS Walk and diabetes."

Stein said the food is also prepared fresh at the store.

"Each piece of chicken is hand breaded here, and each salad starts as a head of lettuce in the store."

Additional Facts

About Chick-Fil-A

> **Size of new restaurant:** 4,195 square feet

> **Jobs at new restaurant:** 60

> **Northern Colorado locations:** Foothills Mall, 215 E. Foothills Parkway, Fort Collins; 1545 Rocky Mountain Ave., Loveland

> **New location:** Southwest corner of Horsetooth Road and College Avenue in Fort Collins Marketplace

> **Chick Fil-A reported sales** of almost \$3 billion last year, a 12 percent increase over its 2007 performance. It marked the company's 41st consecutive year of sales gains.