

Chicken Express: Where being 'cooped up' is a good thing

Written by By PATTI SELLS, News-Telegram Feature Writer
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When the youth of Sulphur Springs are feeling “cooped” up and looking for a place to “express” themselves, they head over to Chicken Express, where “hen” parties are welcome, guys can sit back and check out the “chicks,” and great food can be purchased at “chicken feed” prices.

“This is still the place to be,” said Cary McDade, of his new location at 1125 Mockingbird Lane. “Kids need a place to hang out. They’re going to hang out somewhere—it might as well be here where someone can keep an eye on them.”

According to McDade, the youth of Sulphur Springs actually came up with “Chicken Express – the place to be” as his advertisement slogan on an Interstate 30 billboard near Brashear.

And to show his appreciation to the youth that so faithfully support his establishment, McDade employs 42 area high school and college students at the Sulphur Springs Chicken Express.

McDade and his wife Eva have owned the local establishment for 10 years and have even taken on two other Chicken Express stores, one in Commerce and one in Greenville.

Not bad for someone who started out washing dishes and making deliveries at age 21 for the franchise.

“I’m not the most educated man in the world, but I like people and I work hard,” said McDade. “I just try to set a good example to the kids. When they ask me how I got started, I don’t mind telling them,” said McDade, referring to his climb up the corporate ladder, which ultimately led to an invitation to buy into the business.

“Things are fantastic! The community has been really good to us. We couldn’t ask for better support from our customers,” emphasized McDade, who added that sales are up 25 percent since his move from the old location on Gilmer two years ago. “We just try to give the best

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service back to them.”

With the new location also came 10 pull-up stalls, as well as a drive-thru window and expanded indoor seating.

“We have been really pleased with the new location,” said McDade. “We’re glad to be off the hill and out of that old building. It’s been just amazing.”

According to McDade, the stalls have worked out well, shortening customer wait time to just two or three minutes.

“And you’ve got a nice, shady place to eat,” he said. “It’s just a lot more customer friendly.”

Chicken Express still serves the same great chicken dinners with combo plates from \$5.79 to \$7.99, and family meals from \$10.99 for an eight-piece mixed with six biscuits and one family side, to the family Big Deal which includes 25 tenders, 16 hot wings and three family sides all for \$36.

And of course catfish is still on the menu, too. You can get a 3-piece dinner for \$5.19 or a 5-piece dinner for \$9.69 all the way up to a 19-piece family dinner plus two sides for \$28.99.

“The catfish goes over great around here,” said McDade.

There are lots of places to get really good catfish in this area, he admitted, but what sets Chicken Express apart is the fact that you can just drive through and get it fast and with personable service.

Another perk at Chicken Express is that you can count on getting more than what you paid for,

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according to McDade.

"Richard and Nancy Stewart, founders of Chicken Express, always wanted to make sure that customers got plenty to eat," McDade explained. "They didn't want any body to feel cheated – like they didn't get their monies worth."

Therefore, at Chicken Express you can expect generous portions and often extra pieces in you order-whether chicken or fish.

"It just comes back to you tenfold. It really does," McDade added.

New to the menu is frozen custard that comes in chocolate or vanilla flavors or swirled together. Mini cups cost 99 cents and jumbo cups cost \$8.99 with several sizes in between. Extra toppings of caramel, Butterfinger, Heath bar, M&Ms, Oreos and Reese's Pieces can be added for a little extra charge (both money- and energy-wise).

Slushes, floats and shakes are available too. And, of course, there is always plenty of that famous sweet tea.

"We sell 500 gallons a day of that stuff. It's crazy," said McDade with a laugh. "I know some stores that sell 1000 gallons a day."

According to McDade, when he and his family came to Sulphur Springs 10 years ago they set a goal for themselves that has been exceeded beyond what they could ever have imagined in the business.

"I'm a pretty simple guy and I've worked hard to get my business up to where it is," he explained. "We just threw ourselves into the community through sponsorships and a genuine interest – and here we are today. The business is doing wonderfully, and we are really, really happy to be here – a part of this community."