

## New look for new Beef O'Brady's in Hudson

By Lisa A. Davis, Times Correspondent

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The new Beef O'Brady's in Hudson's new Hays Road Town Center serves as a prototype as the family-friendly bar and grill ushers its restaurants through the economic downturn and expands its franchise base across the country.



[STEPHEN J. CODDINGTON | Times]

HUDSON — A few weeks ago, Cheryl Valinaggi banged on the door of the Beef O'Brady's under construction at State Road 52 and Hays Road.

"When are you going to open?" Valinaggi, a longtime customer of the family pub chain, asked the construction crew inside.

She and her husband, John, were thrilled when the new location finally opened — and even more excited when they discovered this is not your old Beef's.

Gone are the paneled walls, green paint, heavy wooden bars and Tiffany-style lights. The Hudson restaurant uses a new design with fall shades of burnt orange and gold, dark wooden tables and lighter wood floors. The bar tops are sleek black granite, and brushed steel pendants dangle from the ceiling. Corrugated metal is wrapped around the bar's base, giving it a more industrial vibe.

"This is awesome. I love the color. I love the stone," said John Valinaggi, tapping the stonework that encases the back wall of the bar.

Ding, ding, ding. That's exactly what Beef's management wants to hear.

This new location, which opened last week, is the second in the nation of what company executives call "Beef's 2.0," a new prototype to usher the family-friendly bar-and-grill restaurants through a tough economy and into the future.

"Companies over time tweak things to sort of stay with the trends and help them improve the business model," said Beef's CEO Chris Elliott, who's been with the company since March 2010.

A year in the making, the new design concept is a result of working with ideas from four separate focus groups at the 26-year-old company's headquarters in Tampa. The focus groups were made up of Beef's customers only. The goal was to update the restaurants' look without losing their identity. (Beef's signature green still remains on the restaurant seating, for instance.)

"The last thing we wanted (customers) to do was say, 'That's not Beef O'Brady's,'" said Elliott. "We just wanted to take the next step."

In the new design, the bars have enhancements such as digital sports and news tickers that scroll the latest information above the bar (not yet installed in the Hudson location). More beers, including several craft brews, are on tap. "Community tables" in the bar area easily accommodate eight to 10 people.

But the most important upgrade, said Elliott, are the large flat-screen, high definition televisions that dot the walls throughout the restaurant. In Hudson, 25 TVs hang on the walls. A 111-inch projection screen serves as the centerpiece on the back wall.

"We know we lose customers in the stores where the franchisees have not upgraded their TVs," Elliot explained. "People don't want to go somewhere and watch a TV that's not as good as the one at home."

What the 2.0 concept does not include: a price increase.

"We're very sensitive to the impact the economy has on our customers. We're working really hard to keep prices down and our value up," said Elliott.

The Hudson location is not a full 2.0. It is smaller, with 2,800 square feet and 150-seat capacity, rather than the 4,000-square-foot, 170-seat prototype, so it doesn't have the space for a meeting room. While this restaurant does offer takeout, the larger prototype has a designated takeout area in the front. The larger locations also have booths with inset TVs.

The 2.0 design has been a huge hit in its first location in Lake Jackson, Texas, which did \$217,000 in business in its first full month — an amazing feat, said Elliott.

"We weren't in our core market, which is Florida and Tampa, in this economy and we set a company sales record, so that's pretty encouraging," he said.

Chris Overbeck, who owns the Hudson restaurant with his wife, Teresa, said he had been eyeing this store's location for two years, but back then the rent was too high and management didn't want to budge on the price — until a year later. Overbeck, who with a partner owned another Beef's at Hudson Avenue and Little Road from 2001 to 2006, knows the area well. This new site at the Hays Road Town Center is about two miles west of the Suncoast Parkway and close to Fivay High School and Bishop McLaughlin Catholic High.

"This is one of the busiest corners," said Overbeck, who with his wife owns another Beef's at U.S. 41 and Sunset Lane in Lutz. "Knowing Hudson, I've always wanted to get back here."

He said he spent about \$500,000 in franchise fees, inventory and build-out costs for this latest venture, and he thinks it's money well-spent. Opening day far exceeded his expectation, he said.

"We opened the doors and got flooded," he said. "And every night we're on a wait."

He's noticing repeat customers already.

#### **Fast facts about Beef O'Brady's:**

**Founded:** in 1985 by Jim Mellody, who wanted to develop a neighborhood pub where friends and families could gather to enjoy good food and sports in a casual, fun atmosphere.

**First location:** Brandon

**Number of restaurants:** 212

**Locations:** 22 states in the southeast and Midwest, but California and Idaho will soon see their first Beef's. The idea is to take the chain international, with a plan of increasing the locations to 300 over the next five years.

**Next 2.0 location:** a corporate-owned restaurant being built at Busch Boulevard and 56th Street in Temple Terrace, set to open later this year.

**New menu item:** Pizza. The chain is test marketing its own pizza at eight restaurants, including at the new Hudson location. Other new items include hand-breaded chicken tenders and fresh Angus burgers. A new lunch menu is also available with meal deals.

**New logo and taglines:** The newer signs have a different look with lettering that is easier to read from the street. Beneath the name are the words: "Good food. Good sports." Cover of menu now reads: "Where game time meets family time."

**Main competitors:** Chili's, Applebee's and Buffalo Wild Wings.

**New Hudson location:** 14851 State Road 52, at the Hays Road Town Center. Hours are 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday; 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Owners are Chris and Teresa Overbeck. Phone number is (727) 379-WING.