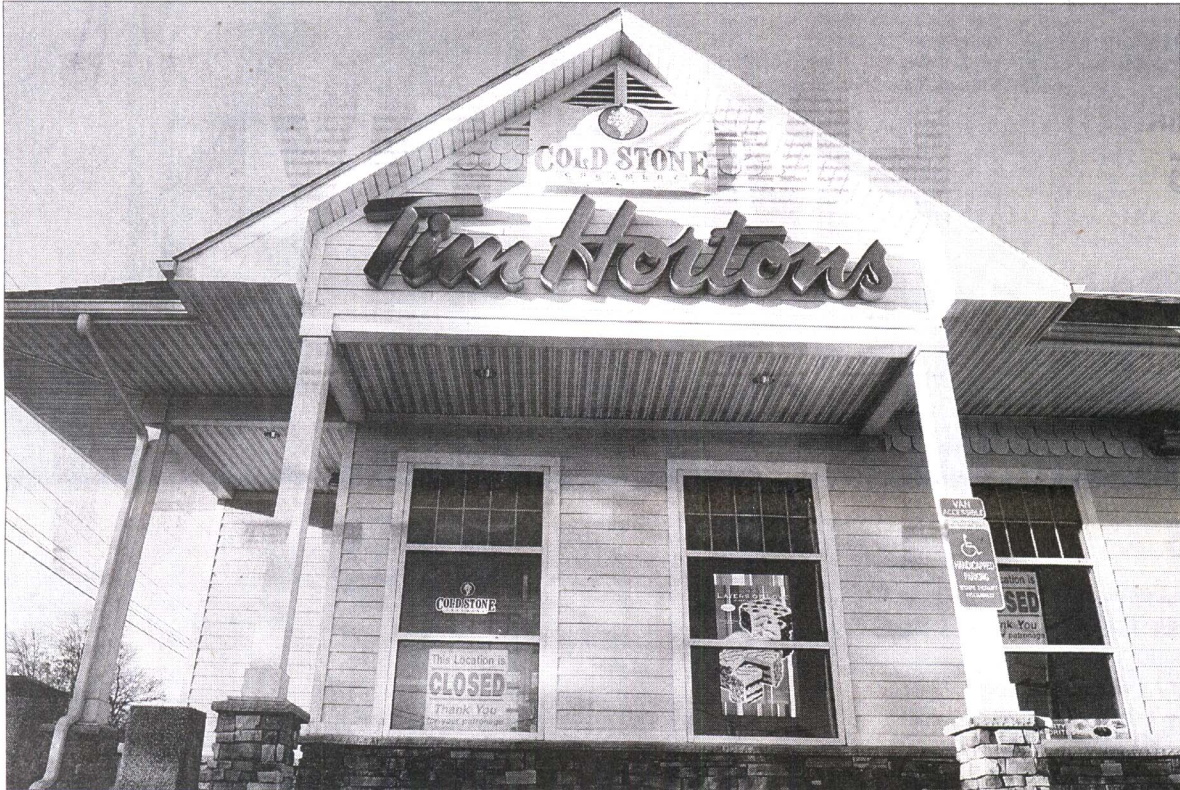


Hartford Courant



Eat At Moe's

Moe's Southwest Grill, a franchise competing in the burrito restaurant market, is expanding aggressively in Connecticut with a store opening in Southington and at least 11 more in the works. [Business, Page A8](#)



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THE TIM HORTONS chain abruptly closed 36 shops in New England on Thursday, including 11 in Connecticut. Among them was, above and below, the Tim Hortons on the Silas Deane Highway in Wethersfield.

TIM HORTONS CLOSES

11 Shops In State Shuttered

By **KENNETH R. GOSSELIN**
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Just what the regulars at Tim Hortons didn't expect Thursday — a different kind of doughnut hole in their daily routine.

Instead of the usual coffee and doughnuts, they were greeted with news that Tim Hortons had abruptly closed all its shops in Connecticut.

On Thursday afternoon, more than a dozen vehicles pulled into the Tim Hortons parking lot in Wethersfield in a 10-minute period on the Silas Deane Highway. Most people seemed surprised to see signs saying, "This location is closed. Thank you for your patronage." A large dumpster was in the parking lot.



Moe's Southwest Grill Expands

By **MARA LEE and DAN HAAR**
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Moe's Southwest Grill, a franchiser competing in the burrito restaurant market, is expanding aggressively in Connecticut with a Southington store opening in January and at least 11 more in the works.

Moe's already has locations in downtown Hartford, West Hartford, South Windsor, New Haven, Fairfield and Glastonbury. It is opening at 800 Queen St. in Southington in January, and plans to open locations along the Merritt Parkway in Milford and Darien in 2011.

Moe's also has sold franchises for Newington, Enfield, Bristol, Middletown, Hamden, Waterbury, Danbury and Stamford, said Moe's President Paul Damico. Locations have not been announced for those franchises.

Restaurants like Moe's, its larger competitor, Chipotle Mexican Grill, and Panera Bread — which all provide counter service instead of table service — have benefited from recession-inspired frugality, Damico said.

He said Moe's sales are up 6 percent compared to last year, comparing only the stores that were open both years. Chipotle's same-store sales were up 11.4 percent, and



FOX CT

MOE'S SOUTHWEST GRILL in New Haven is one of six in Connecticut, but the chain is planning 11 more in the state.

Moe's

Continued from Page A8

Panera's sales were up 6.9 percent, comparing the third quarter of 2010 to the same period in 2009.

These kinds of restaurants are a step up in ambience, and customization, from fast food, but are cheaper than chains like Applebee's, which have table service.

The average bill at Moe's is about \$10, Damico said. "We're not at \$15, like Chili's. We're not at \$5, like McDonald's."

According to a BusinessWeek story published Wednesday, casual restaurants had a 4.7 percent decline in 2009, and all restaurant sales fell 2 percent. The data came from a Restaurant Research analysis of chains with more than \$1 billion in sales.

The new Connecticut locations will be owned by current Connecticut Moe's franchisees, Damico said.

He said financing the construction of a new restaurant, which costs between \$400,000 and \$500,000, is not easy, as banks now want owners to have a 30 percent

down payment, but is not as difficult as it was at the worst of the recession. And he said some franchisees are generating so much cash from the restaurants they already own, they don't need to borrow.

Starting in January at all 415 locations,

The average bill at Moe's is about \$10, says President Paul Damico. "We're not at \$15, like Chili's. We're not at \$5, like McDonald's."

Moe's will offer meat produced differently from the typical industrial-scale farm, Damico said.

"Our chicken is going to be cage-free. Our beef is grass fed and hormone-free," he said. "It's not common but we set that standard. ... It was matching what the consumers were telling us through consumer research."

Moe's is part of FOCUS Brands in Atlanta, which also franchises Carvel and other brands.