



Kenlyn Brown prepares a meal for a customer at Charley's Grilled Subs on Friday afternoon. Chillicothe's Charley's is the first among more than 400 chain locations globally to undergo an evolution from a Charley's Grilled Subs to Charley's Philly Steaks brand. HEATHER CORY/GAZETTE

Chillicothe chosen for debut of new Charley's brand

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CHILICOTHE — Local diners are poised Wednesday to get in on the ground floor of an evolution.

That's the day the Charley's Grilled Subs restaurant on North Bridge Street becomes the first in the Charley's chain to reopen with a new brand, a new look and a somewhat different approach.

The Chillicothe restaurant, which has operated under the Charley's Grilled Subs moniker for a decade, will become the first Charley's Philly Steaks operation in the world. Columbus-based Charley's has invested about \$250,000 in a makeover for the local store, with plans to create jobs by almost doubling the existing restaurant staff size to boost customer service and handle the anticipated increase in business.

The local restaurant was chosen to go first in what Chief Operating Officer Bob Wright called an "evolution of the brand" because of its relationship with the Chillicothe community and the fact that the plan called for renovations to a free-standing store like the one on Bridge Street. Many of the chain's 400-plus locations around the world are locked into food courts, strip malls or other places with similar space restrictions.

"We think we connect real well with customers in this part of the country, so if we're going to develop and test something, we're going to do it close to home," Wright told the Gazette. "That brought us to Chillicothe. It's been a great market for Charley's for over 10 years."

The company had a great relationship with the original store

ABOUT CHARLEY'S

Charley's was founded in 1986 by Charley Shin, who became the company's chief executive officer. Shin had his first encounter with a Philly cheese steak during a family vacation after a missed highway exit brought him to South Philadelphia. He tested different recipes on his college friends in Columbus, and using funds borrowed from his mother's life savings, opened the first Charley's restaurant on the campus of The Ohio State University. The chain now has more than 400 locations around the world and plans to see that number reach 500 by the end of this year.

franchisee, Wright said, and when that franchisee decided to pursue other interests after the 10-year franchise agreement was up, Charley's decided to make the Chillicothe location a company-owned store. Most Charley's locations are owned by individual franchisees.

"It (the local store) was due for some upgrades, and the decision was made that not only do we want to upgrade it, but we also want to make it the first Charley's Philly Steaks," Wright said, adding that some other conversions to the new brand of other restaurants or closed former locations are planned in central Ohio. "It made sense for us to make our first one that we already owned, one where we knew the community and one where we knew we had some operations strength."

Structurally, the most visible change for those passing the

Bridge Street location is a new exterior design and signage with the Charley's Philly Steaks logo. On the inside, the thought process was to completely rebuild the dining area to be warmer and more inviting, to allow the flexibility of moving tables around to accommodate different party sizes and to tell the Charley's story through graphics throughout the store. The open kitchen concept that allows visitors to see food being prepared fresh while they wait will remain in the new design.

What diners might find more important than the look and feel of the restaurant are the expanded menu options, Wright said. A third, smaller sandwich size is being added for those with lighter appetites who want to enjoy Charley's signature creations, larger portions of meat will be included in sandwiches, new offerings of gourmet hot dogs and salads are being added and Charley's own brand of frozen yogurt, Yobell, will bring the same types of active cultures to the frozen product that regular yogurt offered in grocery stores contains.

There are no plans to convert all existing Charley's Grilled Subs locations to the new brand, and the same internal support networks within the company will be available to franchisees of all the company's brands.

That's not to say the experience being launched in Chillicothe won't have an impact felt throughout the company.

"I'm sure that if we do our work well — and we plan to — we're going to learn things that we will absolutely want to play back through Charley's Grilled Subs," Wright said.