

Sonic rockets into Flint Township

By Melissa Burden

mburden@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6316

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FLINT TWP. — The state's second Sonic Drive-In, complete with car stalls and carhops who deliver your order, should open this fall at the corner of Miller Road and Austin Parkway.

A groundbreaking is set for July 14 at the site formerly occupied by a Bill Knapp's restaurant. The Sonic is expected to open in mid-October, said Martha Sanford, director of marketing for Flint Township-based Miller-Apple, the Sonic franchisee.

"I have people ask me all the time, 'When's that Sonic coming? When's that Sonic coming?'" said Tracey Tucker, Flint Township's economic enhancement director.

The more than 1,700-square-foot restaurant will feature 27 car

stalls, outdoor seating and a drive-through, Sanford and Tucker said. Entrances will be off of Miller Road and Austin Parkway, Tucker said.

Michigan got its first taste of Sonic's menu, featuring burgers, coney dogs, onion rings and lime-ades, when a store opened this spring in Southgate. That was the highest-volume opening Sonic has had, said Drew Ritger, senior vice president of development for Oklahoma-based Sonic.

"The brand's been unbelievably well-received (in Michigan)," he said.

People in Michigan have had their appetites whetted for Sonic for years by commercials that appeared locally, even though there was no restaurant. The Sonic chain has more than 3,300 drive-ins across the U.S. and advertises nationally.

Sanford said Miller-Apple has been eyeing Sonic for years and now has a franchise agreement to open 12 Sonics in Michigan. The company hopes to open a restaurant next spring in Lansing and has looked at areas such as Grand Blanc and Ann Arbor as other possible locations, she said.

Flint Township's Sonic should employ "well over 50" people, Sanford said.

"We're excited to have a new concept in the Flint area," she said.

Sonic restaurants also are planned for the Grand Rapids and metro Detroit areas, with one also possible in Lapeer, Ritger said.

Miller-Apple also has 20 Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar franchise locations in Michigan,

Coming soon

Some projects in Flint Township.

- **Sonic Drive-In:** The chain of more than 3,300 drive-in restaurants featuring car stalls and carhops, is coming to Flint Township. A franchisee plans to open a restaurant that features items such as toaster sandwiches, burgers, chili cheese coneys, onion rings, Tater Tots, limeades and shakes in mid-October at the corner of Miller Road and Austin Parkway.
- **Hobby Lobby:** A 55,000-square-foot store going up at Oak Brook Square on Linden Road in Flint Township could open by mid-October. Hobby Lobby has more than 400 stores, and its departments range from crafts and hobbies, picture framing and jewelry making to cards, party and holiday supplies and home accents.

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many in Genesee County, with another slated to open in mid-August on Pierson Road in Mt. Morris Township.

Also under construction

in Flint Township are a new Dunham's Sports store in the Buick City Center shopping plaza off Miller Road and a Hobby Lobby in Oak Brook Square on Linden Road.

Also, construction drawings were submitted recently for a Harley-Davidson motorcycle store set for the former Chi Chi's restaurant property on Austin Park-

way.

Hobby Lobby hopes to open its store by mid-October and likely will employ between 30 and 50 people, said Vince Parker, director of training and customer service for Hobby Lobby Stores Inc., in an e-mail to The Flint Journal.

The company said it saw the Flint area as an underserved market.