

Revved up diners line up early

Crowds wheel in for opening of first local Sonic drive-in

BY MATT VANDE BUNTE
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WYOMING — A 3 a.m. wake-up call from her cousin was too late to make Julie Jousma first in line Monday for the opening of a Sonic drive-in restaurant near U.S. 131 and 54th Street SW.

Still, the Jenison woman was early enough to get a free T-shirt, which she promptly soiled with a mix of mustard and strawberry.

"I got my first stain on my shirt. I'm so excited," said Jousma, 25, after downing a breakfast of cheeseburger, Tater Tots and a beverage.

"You have to go classic, even though it's morning. It's just a nostalgic thing."

Management at the drive-in, at 5521 Clyde Park Ave. SW, served 150 cars in the first 50 minutes after Monday's 6 a.m. opening.

Vehicles were routed through temporary lanes in an adjacent Menards parking lot, and occupants good-naturedly beeped horns and hollered as they inched toward the ordering stalls.

"OK; send four more in," Tim VanderYacht said by walkie-talkie to another employee working the queue of cars.

Moments later, another executive from Trigo Hospitality, a St. Joseph-based franchise holder of the Oklahoma fast-food chain, snapped photos of the first car using the drive-through. Sonic is the nation's largest chain of drive-in restaurants.

First in the carhop-service stalls was a minivan of college friends and relatives who camped in line at 11:30 Sunday night.

"I don't even remember what it is," 20-year-old Matt

Miller said about the burger he was munching. "(The campout) was worth it before I had anything to eat."

The Sonic in Wyoming, one of 3,500 nationwide, offers no indoor dining. Instead, there is carhop service on skates to customers parked in 22 stalls. There also is a drive-through and a walk-up patio window.

Matt VanEss, of Wyoming, ordered a Sonic Burger and onion rings and a breakfast burrito for his wife.

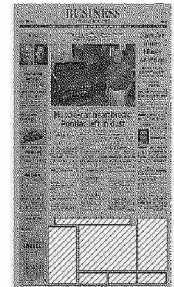
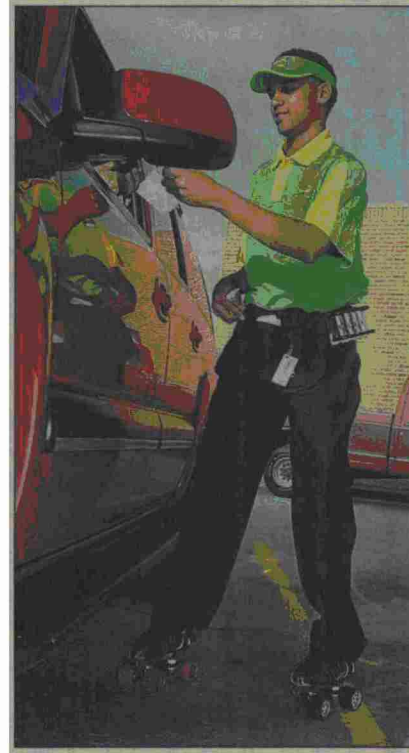
"I only have limited funds," he said, "but I'll be back."

Out in the line of cars, Sonic employee Candessa Williams, 20, rallied customers and gave them ordering instructions.

"My job is to get these guys amped up," she said, then shouted to the car moving to the front of the line. "You're next! Are you ready? Are you really geeked?"

"I walk up to them and just woo 'em," Williams said.

The Wyoming Sonic is one of a handful in Michigan and the first in the Grand Rapids area. Trigo is seeking Alpine Township approval for a second local store, at 3955 Alpine Ave. NW, next to a Wal-Mart.





PRESS PHOTOS/LORI NIEDENFUER COOL

May we be of service? Courtney Moberg, 18, of Kentwood, serves Barb Squires, of Wyoming. And the wheel man, carhop Alex Partee, 20, of Wyoming, serves a car-side breakfast to customer Dorice Perry.