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Red Lobsters cook up fresher look

By: [Perla Trevizo](#)



Staff Photo by Danielle Moore Denise Galloway, right, and Louis Lee sample new menu items at Red Lobster during an open house in Chattanooga to show off the restaurant's newly refreshed image. The restaurant off Bams Drive near Hamilton Place was one of the first locations in the country to be renovated.

The atmosphere of a seaside village is what executives at Red Lobster hope area customers will feel as they update the local restaurants.

"We are making very significant changes," said Chip Wade, senior vice president of Red Lobster's Liberty division. "We've been working on this project for about three, four years, researching everything from listening to the guests in restaurants as well as doing focus groups in different markets."

And one of those last changes was remodeling the restaurants, he said.

The Hamilton Place location, where Red Lobster executives and staff recently held an open house, together with the location in Hixson and Dalton, Ga., are three of 51 restaurants being remodeled this year.

Within three years they hope to complete the 700-fleet of restaurants, said Erica Jaeger, media and communications manager for Red Lobster.

The new look includes softer lights, higher booths, neutral blue fabric colors, artwork of light houses, and even nautical signal flags at the entrance that spell "fresh," the company motto, Ms. Jaeger said.

Jill Watson, state Sen. Bo Watson's wife, said Red Lobster has been a family tradition for over 30 years.

She attended the open house with her mother, Kay Lippse, and her husband.

"It's quite a change," she said. "The ambiance is a lot more soothing."

"It's a lot more inviting," added Mrs. Lippse. "It was kind of dated; the renovation has definitely made it an upscale eating establishment instead of just a good place to get fish."

Mr. Wade said he couldn't disclose the dollar amount of the investment, but "as a brand, we want to continuously reinvest in the business and we want to make investments that resonate with the guests. We wanted to make a significant of an investment that the guest would feel, see and touch."

The Chattanooga market was chosen because of the number of locations, he said.

"We wanted to make sure we could get some penetration, we didn't want to do single-restaurant markets, we wanted to do markets that have multiple locations, we wanted to take advantage of the communities where we serve and take advantages of efficiencies," he added.

Other markets being remodeled this year include Pittsburgh, Minneapolis and Cincinnati.

"At a time when so many places are pulling out of American communities, this investment will last for decades to come," said Ms. Jaeger. "This is a statement that says we are here to stay and we value the Chattanooga area."

REMODELING

- * Dark-wood paneling
- * Soft lighting
- * Seashore-inspired artwork
- * Adirondack-style benches
- * Shingle and stone towers on the outside
- * Ship lanterns

ON THE WEB

www.redlobster.com/barharbor

BY THE NUMBERS

- * 700: Number of restaurants nationwide
- * 3: Number of restaurants in the Chattanooga-area
- * \$2.62 billion: Total sales in fiscal year 2009
- * 51: Number of restaurants being remodeled