

Brazilian steakhouse Rodizio Grill coming to Arena District

BY DAN EATON | BUSINESS FIRST

Every man who has taken his wife to a romantic meal at the **Melting Pot** soon will have a dining spot where he can be treated instead.

Yep, another Brazilian steakhouse is headed to Columbus.

George and Kelly Chaposky, franchisees of the Melting Pot fondue restaurant at **Easton Town Center**, are getting into the all-you-can-eat meat game with Rodizio Grill, a Sandy, Utah-based chain with four restaurants in two states. George Chaposky wouldn't commit to an opening date but said interior construction for the restaurant at 125 W. Nationwide Blvd. in the Arena District will begin soon.

Suddenly a city bereft of Brazilian-style noshing—think grilled meats skewered and sliced tableside to your heart's content—will have two choices. Dallas-based **Texas de Brazil** plans to open at Easton this year as well.

The Chaposkys see Rodizio Grill as the meaty yang to the Melting Pot's cheesy yin.

"A lot of people think of (the Melting Pot) as being more women-oriented," he said. "We thought, 'What can we do for our male customers?'"

The 8,000-square-foot space at Nationwide and Marconi Boulevard, next to BD's Mongolian Grill, has never been leased. Plans call for 300 seats in a festive atmosphere.

"We're trying to bring our level of service from the Melting Pot, with the fun of the concept," Chaposky said.

The "full Rodizio" includes an unlimited supply from seven choices of beef, four poultry selections, three pork options, seasonal lamb and seafoods (they'll grill whole pineapples as well), plus access to a salad bar. Chaposky said the average check will be in the \$30 range. He declined to share sales projections. Texas de Brazil said its average check will be above \$40.

Rodizio Grill credits itself as the first Brazilian-style steakhouse, or churrascaria, in the U.S., founded by native Brazilian Ivan Utrera. But other chains, including the 18-restaurant **Fogo de Chao** and Texas de Brazil, with 22 restaurants, have grown faster. Rodizio expects to more than double in size this year. It has four restaurants open in Utah and Colorado. A Florida restaurant is scheduled to debut this month, and steakhouses in Massachusetts and

Minnesota also are expected to open this year.

The chain touts its authenticity so heavily that it mandates franchisees travel to Brazil to see how it's done in the home country.

"I know, twist my arm," Chaposky said of the trip.

He said a fellow Melting Pot franchisee is a Rodizio Grill franchisee and told them about the chain. Fondue is a niche and Brazilian steakhouses are niche so the fit made sense, he said.

The Chaposkys explored opening at Easton but the retail complex had already begun discussions with Texas de Brazil. They also looked at Polaris and the Dublin area before deciding on downtown in an area where a mix of offices, residences and event traffic make the location appealing.

"We're very excited about being in the Arena District," he said. ■

Dan Eaton covers retail, restaurants, manufacturing, automotive and the advertising/PR industry for Business First.