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Dick's Last Resort brings unruly fun to the Arena District.

Dick's Last Resort offers Arena District diners party-hearty fun

By Gary Seman Jr.
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Dick's Last Resort, set to open today in the Arena District, specializes in a comical, raucous environment in which servers and patrons are expected to trade well-placed insults.

"It's unruly fun for everyone," said Ralph McCracken, president and chief operating officer of DLR Restaurants. "And that's for all ages, too."

The volume can be appreciable, especially at night.

"It's a lot," general manager David Swann said. "People love shtick."

The Nashville, Tenn.-based company, which now has 15 company-owned stores across the U.S., has taken over 5,200 square feet at 343 N. Front St. near the main entrance of Nationwide Arena. The company soon will buy back a location in Dallas, while a Chicago restaurant will remain in the hands of a licensee.

McCracken likes to say he's in the entertainment business, not the restaurant business.

"People come to us and eat," he said. "They don't come to us to eat."

Servers aren't simply hired; they audition, McCracken said.

"We allow servers to be themselves," he said.

Dick's is generally located in tourist markets. And although Columbus is not a high-profile vacation destination, the Arena District is a great spot, offering a vibrant entertainment scene, a lot of special-event traffic and proximity to the Greater Columbus Convention Center, McCracken said.

The site has seen some turnover. Most recently, 343 Front occupied the space. Before that, it was Frog, Bear and Wild Boar.

Customers are seated at community tables, so a bachelorette party can dine alongside a family get-together.

Although a party-hearty atmosphere is cheered, a respectful one also is maintained, Swann said.

“We’ve evolved over the years,” he said. “We want people to laugh.”

Each patron is issued a bib upon being seated.

“The food’s a little sloppy,” he said.

The bill of fare is American comfort food: ribs, salmon, steaks, fried chicken, fish and chips, and such, priced between \$14 and \$25. In the evenings, no menus are distributed. The nightly offerings are written on a chalkboard.

Touted appetizers include deep-fried alligator bites and “redneck fondue”—tater tots smothered in nacho cheese and bacon, with sour cream for dipping.

At lunch, the atmosphere’s a little mellower, as the staff recognizes that busy workers don’t have a lot of time for spiel. Burgers, sandwiches and salads all are on the roster, costing around \$10 a plate. A sandwich will be featured daily, ringing in at \$6.99 with fries.

Butcher-paper place mats are folded into hats, resembling a chef’s toque, on which patrons are encouraged to write kooky—but kid-friendly—messages. There is no prohibition against ripping up the paper into confetti—and

customers take advantage, Swann said.

“It’s not uncommon to come in here on a Saturday night and be ankle deep in white paper,” he said.

Dick’s offers wine, 14 beers on tap and 100 by the bottle, and a range of specialty drinks, which can be served in a custom-designed real coconut shell, offered as a souvenir glass. The drink menu also offers a 45-ounce margarita and “dos-rita” topped off with a 12-ounce bottle of Dos Equis beer.

Adding to the zaniness, the interior is decorated in non-unifying bric-a-brac.

There is some historical context for the restaurant’s name and ambience, Swann said. The original Dick’s was founded 30 years ago by the late Richard Chase, whose fine-dining restaurant in Dallas was taking a bath.

He overhauled the concept, replacing the fixtures with non-matching items he found at yard sales.

Dick’s kitchen hours are 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 11 a.m. to midnight Friday and Saturday. The bar will stay open later. For more information, call 614-230-0595. ■