

As seen in the *Austin American-Statesman*

## HAT CREEK BURGER TO PUT DOWN ROOTS IN WEST LAKE HILLS OWNER SAYS HE HOPES TO ADD UP TO 10 LOCATIONS ACROSS THE REGION IN THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS.



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Austin-based Hat Creek Burger Co. has flipped into expansion mode, with plans to open a flagship location next year in West Lake Hills and up to 10 Central Texas locations in the next few years.

The West Lake Hills restaurant is planned for the site of the Pots & Plants Garden Center at Bee Cave Road and Capital of Texas Highway (Loop 360). The plant nursery, known for its covey of plastic pink flamingos overlooking the highway, is closing by year end.

Stream Realty Partners, Hat Creek's real estate partner in its expansion push, has a contract to buy the 1.2-acre site, which is studded with live oak trees that will remain.

Drew Gressett, who grew up in West Lake Hills, started Hat Creek in 2008 with a trailer on West Sixth Street downtown, where he sold burgers, hand-cut fries, and malts and milkshakes made from Blue Bell ice cream.

Hat Creek's first sit-down restaurant opened last year in a former Arby's on Burnet Road.

Gressett, 29, will open the Westlake restaurant in an existing building on the Pots & Plants site that will be remodeled by Duke Garwood Architects.



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## HAT CREEK BURGER TO PUT DOWN ROOTS IN WEST LAKE HILLS (CONTINUED)

Gressett, backed by investors that include family and friends, said the restaurant will be a place where parents can dine or sip wine or beer while their children romp in a fenced playscape area.

Gressett said he hopes to fill a void in West Lake Hills, which he said has a long tradition of popular burger joints including the now-closed Willie's and Mr. C's, which he recalls from the 1980s, and later, Time Out for Burgers.

"There's a gap where there hasn't been a locally owned family operated burger establishment, and that's what we're excited about bringing back to the community," said Gressett, who now lives in Central Austin.

Preparing to expand

Gressett's plans are subject to required city approvals, including obtaining a permit to serve beer and wine. The City Council is expected to consider the project in mid-January.

Mayor Dave Claunch said he thinks the project "really preserves the unique character of that property and will be a great benefit to our community."

Gressett graduated from Westlake High School in 2000 and later played basketball for the University of Texas before graduating in 2004.

The Westlake location will be preceded by a Hat Creek due to open early next year at a yet-to-be-announced location in the UT area.

Gressett isn't disclosing other potential locations but said he hopes to open five to 10 in the region in the next three to five years.

Hat Creek is one of several local restaurant chains that are expanding in the region, including Mighty Fine Burgers.

In the West Lake Hills area, Hat Creek will face competition from a national chain a few miles east on Bee Cave Road.

Carl's Jr. will open a company-owned restaurant, its sixth Austin-area location, at Bee Cave and Walsh Tarlton Lane in January, said Julie McLean, a spokeswoman for California-based CKE Restaurants Inc., which owns Carl's Jr. and Hardee's.

Carl's Jr. averages \$1.2 million a year in revenue, she said.

Gressett said he has dreamed of having his own burger restaurant ever since high school. "I just love cheeseburgers," he said.

Hat Creek uses all-natural Black Angus beef that is hand-pattied daily, as well as fresh-cut vegetables and french fries, and bread from Mrs Baird's Bakery, Gressett said. A hand-pattied turkey burger is new to the menu.

Gressett said Hat Creek has 25 employees, including workers in its catering operation. The work force is expected to grow to 75 in 2011, including an estimated 30 people who will work at the Westlake location.

Hat Creek is one of the concessionaires at the UT men's basketball, football and baseball events.

## HAT CREEK BURGER TO PUT DOWN ROOTS IN WEST LAKE HILLS (CONTINUED)



People are 'fired up'

Stream Realty will work with Hat Creek on real estate acquisitions, said Derek Land, co-managing partner of Stream, an Austin-based commercial real estate firm.

Land declined to divulge what Stream is paying for the Westlake site. The property is valued at nearly \$662,300 on the Travis County appraisal rolls.

Land said the restaurant will be designed to blend into the landscape and evoke an atmosphere that "feels like you're in Westlake, not Dallas."

"Everybody we're talking to about it is fired up," said Land, who got to know Gressett through their church, Austin Ridge Bible Church.

Hat Creek has teamed up with the church and the local nonprofit Mobile Loaves & Fishes to deliver several hundred cheeseburgers a week to homeless people in Austin.

Trey Salinas, a principal with 3 Point Partners, an Austin-based public affairs firm, who attended Westlake High School, said he thinks Hat Creek will be well-received.

"It'll be like having Willie's again," Salinas said, noting that Willie's was "the big high school hangout" in the 1980s.

"I'll be eating burgers there with Jake and Sarah," he said of his son, 13, and daughter, 11. "A locally owned burger hangout is perfect."

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