

Native New Yorker winging its way to Albuquerque

BY KATHI SCHROEDER / NMBW MANAGING EDITOR

Despite its name, **Native New Yorker** is a home-grown Arizona business with aggressive plans to expand into Albuquerque and Rio Rancho.

The Gilbert, Ariz.-based restaurant operation plans to have agreements for 35 new franchised stores in at least 15 markets by the end of this year, with agreements to operate in almost 60 cities likely by the end of 2008, executives say.

Mario Altiery, president of the Phoenix, Ariz.-based **Upside Group**, a franchise consulting group working with the privately held Native New Yorker on its Albuquerque expansion plans, says it's a five store package.

"There will be four locations in Albuquerque with a fifth store in Rio Rancho. We've found some locations and are moving through leases, licensing and permitting," he said.

Eric Gessler, his wife Jenifer, and John Cooper are partners in **HGC Investments LLC**, the franchisee that will be developing the restaurants in central New Mexico. Cooper, who has New Mexico connections and a 20-year background in **Pizza Hut** management, will oversee HGC's operations in Albuquerque.

Cooper said the trio hopes to have the first restaurant open by late summer or early fall at a Westside location on Coors, between Irving and Paseo del Norte. The restaurant will occupy 6,000 square feet of the former Western Warehouse store there, sharing the roof with a **Payless Shoe Store** and a new, unidentified tenant. He said the restaurant will

feature an outdoor patio off the front of the building.

Although HGC Investments has not yet hired a builder, Gessler said the group will be using local contractors to construct the restaurants. **De Rito Partners Inc.** in Phoenix is handling the brokerage details.

Native New Yorker's menu features American café-style offerings ranging from green chile burgers, sandwiches and salads to pizza and Italian dishes, nachos, hoagies, and the restaurant's signature chicken wings. The family-oriented sports restaurant has listening stations on every table and flat-screen TVs throughout, although the family dining space is completely separate from the bar, which also offers sports coverage.

Once construction starts on the first Duke City dining establishment, the partners will start firming up other locations. Sites at the top of its list include the **Winrock/ABQ Uptown** area, the **University of New Mexico** neighborhood, Montgomery Boulevard, and Rio Rancho.

"After Albuquerque, it seems the next major place [for Native New Yorker to expand] looks to be Texas," Altiery added.

The company charges a \$45,000 franchise fee per location and Altiery said it could assign other territories in New Mexico to other franchisees. The HGC investors have the franchise rights to a region stretching from Las Cruces to Rio Rancho.

The Native New Yorker concept was launched as LaMonica's, a pizza restaurant, in the Phoenix Valley by the Anderson family in 1975, after a move there from Buffalo, N.Y. The company

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changed its name in 1980 in honor of a Barbra Streisand song that played while the five-member Anderson family was painting a restaurant's interior. Over time, they made chicken wings — a Tuesday night special — into a menu staple and opened more than a dozen stores across the Phoenix area.

"We grew up in the restaurant business and it's really important for us to include families," said Sherri Anderson Lind, vice president of franchise services.

Lind is one of the four Anderson daughters to run the business started by their parents, Floyd and Judy Anderson, who both maintain an active role in the company.

To learn more about Native New Yorker or the Upside Group, visit: www.native.newyorker.com or www.upsidegroup.biz, respectively.

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