

Bojangles' Restaurants eyeing Anniston

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Fans of chicken and biscuits may get a new dining option in the area. North Carolina-based **Bojangles'** Restaurants, founded in 1977, is eyeing the region, including Anniston, as part of an expansion throughout Alabama.

Eric Newman, executive vice president for development for **Bojangles'**, says the company has lined up a group of franchise investors who plan to open restaurants in Anniston, Gadsden, Talladega and Fort Payne.

"Anniston is their first priority," he said.

Newman said the company is looking to develop more locations in the state through a combination of corporate and franchise restaurants.

In the state, the company currently has locations in Huntsville and Dothan, with four more planned to open this year, including Northport and Clinton by mid-summer, a press release from the company said.

Newman said the site for a potential Anniston location has not yet been chosen, but that the restaurants can be housed in converted buildings or can be built from scratch.

He said the restaurants typically employ 50 people, with a combination of full and part-time positions, and each project typically involves a commitment of \$1.5 to \$2 million, including real estate acquisition, construction and employees.

As the recession continues, Newman said fast food restaurants are uniquely positioned to weather the downturn, because when the economy is hurting "quick service tends to strengthen rather than weaken," partly because many consumers cut back on eating out, especially for dinner, but will "trade down," to fast food.

A downturn in the real estate market also spurs the current growth strategy, he said, because real estate and construction costs are down. "We see an opportunity to expand during the time when our economic model is positively impacted," he said. "We can afford to go places we couldn't afford to go."

While relative newcomers to the state, Newman said **Bojangles'** unique recipes — their iced tea and biscuits, chicken and rice dishes — as well as the breakfast all day long offerings, should be a good fit in Alabama.

Bojangles', he said, is "quite serious about breakfast and about biscuits."