

Panda Express plans more locations

ROBERT EVATT | Tulsa World
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Pandas are notorious for being difficult to breed, so their numbers have remained low.

Panda Express is a different matter. The fast-casual Asian food chain will augment its first Tulsa restaurant with two more in the area by early next year, and it hopes to establish at least four more around town in the near future.

Laura L. Lund, regional real estate manager for the Rosemead, Calif.-based chain, confirmed it will soon break ground on the southwest corner of 21st Street and Yale Avenue, and at the Shops at Broken Arrow near Lynn Lane and Kenosha Street.

Panda Express continues to grow, and not just in metropolitan Tulsa, she said.

"We've been focused on the western U.S., but we're expanding regionally," Lund said.

The chain has more than 1,260 locations, including one near 71st Street and Mingo Road. Although the company was already planning expansion in Tulsa, the restaurant's performance since it opened last month exceeded expectations, Lund said.

"It's been extremely well-received," she said. "We're delighted with the results."

Broken Arrow was a priority location because of its strong retail growth, Lund said. Construction of the restaurant there should be completed by early 2010, if not late this year.

The chief advantage of the midtown Tulsa location is its proximity to Expo Square, Lund said.

"We're across the street from the fairgrounds, which is a great way to be integrated into the community," she said. "And we'll have a lot of people coming in from out of town who will now see us."

That location will be identical to the one at 71st and Mingo. Lund declined to release square footages and construction costs, but a construction permit for the midtown location estimated it would cost \$740,000 to build.

Panda Express typically employs 15 to 20 people at each restaurant, she said.

Panda Express

Headquarters: Rosemead, Calif.

Locations: More than 1,260

Metro locations: 9815 E. 71st St., with two more planned