

## Restaurant no longer a spring chicken

For many Warren County residents, there's never been a time in their lives where there wasn't Chicken Chef. The restaurant is like a familiar friend with a warm smile.

Chicken Chef celebrated a milestone Saturday as the restaurant turned 50. Even at that age, it still looks great.

It was a grand occasion for Donnie Hill, who has owned Chicken Chef for 43 of its 50 years. His children and many family members have grown up working at the restaurant, which is an iconic symbol on The Strip.

Chicken Chef first opened in McMinnville on Jan. 20, 1968. McMinnville Mayor Franklin Blue was on hand for the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Donnie explained Chicken Chef was a chain at that time with several restaurants in Tennessee, Kentucky and Alabama. He says this is the only one which remains.

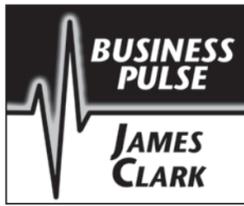
Donnie and his wife Betty bought the business from Vernon Keith in 1975. Their children, Betsy McBride and Clay Hill, always remember Chicken Chef being part of their lives.

"People who have moved away from McMinnville tell me Chicken Chef is always the place they eat when they come back home," said Betsy. "There are a lot of people who eat here every day, sometimes twice a day. It's always been a family business. Mom would work during the day and dad would work at night. Mom had such an influence on the business. Everyone knew her. She passed away about 16 years ago."

Clay worked at Chicken Chef as a teen to earn a little gas money. Along the way, he said he gained far more than a paycheck.

"We've always tried to have good morals and a good work ethic here," said Clay. "This place taught me the value of hard work."

In addition to family members, there have been many valuable employees. Betsy said waitress Melissa Judkins started working at Chicken Chef when she was 16 and is still there more than 20 years later.



Kayla Thomas has been the manager for three years and Betsy credits her with rejuvenating the menu, which includes a big after-church meal on Sundays with items like chicken 'n dumplings and meatloaf.

Betsy says the busiest times are Friday nights, Saturday mornings, and Sunday after church. Chicken Chef is known for its cozy atmosphere with a seating capacity of 42.

"We've always thought about expansion but we don't really have room on the property," said Betsy. "A lot of times when places expand, it takes something away. It's not the same."

For its 50th birthday celebration, Chicken Chef offered 50-cent drinks and customers were treated to cupcakes. Yum. With 50 years in the books, Chicken Chef begins its quest for 50 more.

### THIS NEWS COULD BE SWEET

If you're hungry for business news, here's a story that's in its early phases. Tiaras & Tadpoles has gone out of business at 224 East Main Street, leading to questions about what owner Megan Dodson might do with the building. Speculation about what might locate there has already been circulating so I called the friendly Warren County government folks to see if the property had changed hands.

It turns out, a deal was finalized Tuesday and Megan has sold the property to Vanilla Bean Baking Company. The listed selling price is \$110,000.

Since no other contact information is listed on the deed, other than a P.O. Box for property tax purposes, I



Gathering at Chicken Chef for the restaurant's 50th birthday celebration are, front row, from left, Chris McBride, Betsy McBride, Donnie Hill, Clay Hill, and Christie Hill holding Kensington Hill. Middle row, Annaston McBride, Cameron Chilcutt, Rance McBride, Haley Nuckols, Brittany Myers and Kayla Thomas. Back row, Clay Myers, Ali Hollandsworth, Madison Cope and Sandra Taylor.

called Megan to see if she could fill me in on the details. A baking company is a business that catches my interest since I like to eat sweet things including, but not limited to, cake, donuts, pie, cookies and gingerbread. Strawberry shortcake is also delicious, although not necessarily a bakery staple.

Megan was very polite, but said she didn't feel comfortable disclosing any information about the new property owners. She said she would convey a message to them so perhaps they will give me a call and tell me all the mouth-watering details.

Whatever goes in that spot is a little ways from opening.

When I looked through the window Friday, there were a couple bags at the front but the rest of the store was empty.

### GILLEY GETS SET AT PINNACLE

It's been a couple months and Tyler Gilley has settled into his role as a physician's assistant at Pinnacle



Those gathering at Chicken Chef for the ribbon cutting on Jan. 20, 1968 included McMinnville Mayor Franklin Blue, to the left of the chicken, waitress Karen Taft, and restaurant operator Vernon Keith, second from left.

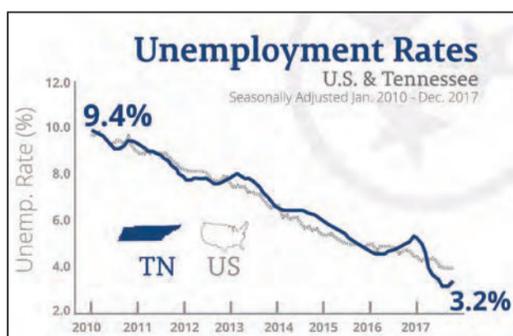
Orthopaedics. Tyler is available to help ease all your aches and pains, including problems of the foot, ankle, knee, hip and shoulder.

"The only bone we don't treat is the skull," said

Tyler. "I really like this type of work and getting to help patients from pediatrics to geriatrics. We handle everything from broken bones and sports-related injuries to arthritis and ten-

dinitis." If Tyler looks familiar that's because he was born and raised in Warren County.

Continued on 4C



## State ends year with 3.2% unemployment

Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam and Department of Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner Burns Phillips have announced Tennessee ended 2017 with more than 28,000 new jobs across the state and an unemployment rate nearly 2 percentage points lower than 2016.

Since 2011, a total of 391,300 new private-sector jobs have been created in Tennessee, state officials say.

"Jobs are created when businesses put capital at risk, and we've created an environment in Tennessee that encourages job growth and is attracting more companies to expand and locate here," Haslam said. "We've also invested in our citizens through Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect to prepare our workforce for the job demands of today's employers."

The unemployment rate in Tennessee for December 2017 was 3.2 percent, 1.9 percentage points less than the rate in December 2016.

Tennessee first marked a historic low unemployment rate in June at 3.6 percent, which was bested by the July rate of 3.4 percent, and then fell even lower in August to 3.3 percent. It hit a new historic low of 3 percent in both September and October. November's rate inched up to 3.1 percent.

Tennessee's unemployment rate continues to post well below the national rate of 4.1 percent, which has remained unchanged since October.

"To have a six-month stretch of such low unemployment is great for Tennesseans," Phillips said. "But we know there are still citizens searching for a good job and the state is ready to help them find that job."

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