

BIG HORN COUNTY NEWS

Pizza Factory Eyes Hardin as Possible Franchise Location

Andrew Turck | August 30, 2018



Pizza Factory employees begin the pizza-making process by tossing dough into the air. The restaurant currently is looking into gaining a franchisee for its first Montana location in more than a decade.

An “old-fashioned pizzeria” franchise with about 115 locations across the western United States has identified the Hardin area as a place “conducive to our brand,” according to its CEO Mary Jane Riva. The location within Montana for the restaurant – called Pizza Factory – has not been decided at press time, but when it is set, it will be the sole franchise spot within the state.

Pizza Factory’s previous owners had opened a Kalispell location, Riva said, but it closed in the lead-up to the U.S. financial crisis of 2007-08. With 24 years’ experience as a Pizza Factory franchisee, she took charge of the restaurant in 2012.

Each Pizza Factory, she said, makes their ingredients on-site from scratch, with 100 percent mozzarella cheese; and homemade dough, meatballs and lasagna.

“They’re still looking for a franchisee in the area to open up the location,” said Katie Gibbons, public relations associate for the restaurant. “It doesn’t have a set time or date.”

According to Riva, the “sweet spots” for Pizza Factory locations are “small towns with a lot of growing families.” Hardin – with its population of about 4,000 people – fits her parameters.

“We tend to do well in towns of 50 to 60,000 or less,” she said, “and we go down as low as 2,700 to 5,000 people.”

Her hometown of Oakhurst, California stands at roughly 3,000 residents.

Many Pizza Factory franchisees, Riva said, are looking to live a “different-paced life” than they may have been used to in a larger city. Connections between the restaurant and its surrounding community, she added, are important.

“I’m not saying that others aren’t, but our franchisees are really engaged in their communities on more levels than just a business,” she said. “They work their business – they’re not just putting in managers, they’re actually in there. They go out to their community and they’re a part of it.”

Pizza Factory, its website states, is “committed to raising awareness” on the subject of bullying through “No Bully Zone” T-shirts and PSAs; and “Buddy Benches,” where young students can sit “at recess to communicate to others that they are feeling lonely or left out.” The restaurant donates a Buddy Bench to a local school near each franchise location and hosts a presentation aimed to curb bullying.

According to a 2014 study by the University Council for Educational Administration, one in 10 students drop out of school due to repeated bullying. Riva would like to help knock that number down to zero.

She began the No Bully program when she observed different groups of high school-aged Pizza Factory employees not getting along. New employees, she said, “would be treated differently or not as welcome in the group because they didn’t know each other.”

Her son also dealt with significant amounts bullying in high school, she continued, “mostly because he was gay.”

“We started within our own kitchen that when someone comes in as a new employee, whether you are friends with them in your school or outside of the workplace, they’re to [be treated with respect],” Riva said. “Then we took it into the community and then we took it into the schools.”

For a lot of the teenagers working at Pizza Factory, she said, it’s their first job, where they can grow and develop a work ethic. She has four people who began work for her at 16, she continued, and now – in their 30s – “realized college wasn’t for them” and became franchisees.

“Being owner-operator stores, it’s a connection we make with the communities,” Riva said. “I think that’s what really sets us apart.”

For more information on Pizza Factory, go online to pizzafactory.com.