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Gator's Dockside Eatery To Open Soon

The casual dining chain will be at Highland City Town Center.

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A new chain is nudging its way into Polk County's dining scene. Orlando-based Gator's Dockside has signed a lease for a site at the Publix-anchored Highland City Town Center under construction at U.S. 98 and Clubhouse Road.

Paul Cipparone, president of Gator's Dockside, said the 6,000-square-foot eatery should open within six to nine months and will be within the Town Center's main strip, not in an outparcel.

"We think it's a great, growing area. Hopefully we can open up more than one," Cipparone said of Polk. "Our two growth areas are from Orlando to Tampa and from Orlando to Jacksonville. We want to keep filling in the two breaks in the middle."

Gator's opened in Jacksonville in 1991 and currently has 18 locations stretching from Jacksonville to Lake Worth. The casual chain offers a variety of sandwiches, seafood and chicken wings, with lunches averaging \$6 to \$7 and dinners priced around \$10 to \$11, Cipparone said.

Of the existing locations, 14 are franchises, Cipparone said. The Lakeland site also will be a franchise.

Cipparone said Gator's Dockside is already drawing business from customers in Northeast Polk who frequent a recently opened location in Clermont. An Ocala location should open about the same time as the Lakeland site, he said.

In related news, developer Watkins Retail Group has announced a list of tenants for the 95,000-square-foot (not including outparcels) Highland City Town Center.

They include: Bamboo Wok Chinese, Burger King, Computer Edge, Cuppy's Coffee,

Mid-Florida Credit Union, NBT Discount Liquor, Palace Pizza, Subway and Fifth Third Bank.

Publix officials are projecting an April 24 opening date for their 45,000-square-foot store.

Eric Battisone, a leasing associate for Watkins, said the developer is working out lease details with four additional tenants. The shopping center covers 28 of about 90 acres owned by Watkins, and Battisone said the firm has plans for a single- and multi-family residential development on the site that would be built by Watkins or an outside company.

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