

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears above any article. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

[Opens Tuesday]

Krispy Kreme Franchise Takes a Trial Run in Lakeland

By [Kyle Kennedy](#)
THE LEDGER

Published: Friday, April 8, 2011 at 10:13 p.m.

LAKELAND | Ready yourselves, Krispy Kreme loyalists: the D-day for your favorite doughnuts is at hand.

The area's first Krispy Kreme franchise will open 5:30 a.m. Tuesday in Lakeland at 4209 South Florida Ave.

"We're expecting a huge turnout," said General Manager Jerry Coe, who briefly opened the shop Friday morning for a sneak preview event. Employees handed out countless boxes of the decadently glazed doughnuts to city officials and members of the business community.

Coe said he can relate to those who have longed for a local source of Krispy Kremes.

"I live in Bartow so I know this community wanted us. We're going to have an overwhelming response," he says.

Coe and franchise owner Mark Gauthier will keep the Lakeland Krispy Kreme open 24 hours a day for at least the first month of operation. If traffic demands it, the shop will maintain its 24-hour schedule indefinitely, but Coe says they at least plan on staying open all night on Fridays and Saturdays to cater to late-night crowds.

Gauthier, who owns a handful of Krispy Kreme franchises in the Tampa area, says



CALVIN KNIGHT / THE LEDGER

THE NEW Krispy Kreme location on South Florida Avenue invited members of the business community for a store preview Friday morning. The franchise is the first in Lakeland.

he's considering additional Polk County locations if the Lakeland store takes off.

"Over the years we've had people who come from Lakeland regularly and ask for it," he said. "We just continually got feedback from Polk County and Lakeland residents."

Gauthier said the late New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner was among the doughnut devotees at his West Kennedy Boulevard location in Tampa. On Thursday he earned the adulation of at least one Lakeland city commissioner.

"I'm glad you're here," City Commissioner Phillip Walker told Gauthier. "I've been spreading the word."

Walker said he first fell in love with Krispy Kreme while an undergraduate student at Morris Brown College in Atlanta. For years he's driven to Tampa or Brandon to pick up the doughnuts for church fundraisers.

At Morris Brown, "I used to walk from my dormitory to get doughnuts when the ("Hot Now" sign) light came on," Walker said.

Based in Winston-Salem, N.C., Krispy Kreme started in 1937 and remained a southeastern U.S. fixture for decades before undergoing a major national expansion in the late 1990s. The chain has grown its global presence since expanding to Canada and overseas beginning in 2001.

Krispy Kreme now has roughly 650 stores in 21 countries, but the company's popularity hasn't always been reflected in its financial performance. Last year the business reported earnings of just \$7.6 million and \$362 million in revenue, marking the first profitable year since fiscal 2004.

Regardless, the cult of Krispy Kreme is vast and passionate, Gauthier says. He expects to find people waiting outside the Lakeland shop's door when it opens Tuesday — especially since the first person in line will receive a year's supply of the doughnuts.

When Gauthier opened a Carrollwood location in Tampa in 2002 fans showed up as early as seven hours before the doors opened, and some motorists slept in their cars in the drive-through lane, according to the St. Petersburg Times.

"There's going to be people camping out there, we think" Gauthier said Friday in Lakeland.

He'll find out soon enough.

[Kyle Kennedy can be reached at kyle.kennedy@theledger.com or 863-802-7584.]

Copyright © 2011 TheLedger.com — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.