

Airport restaurant to change hands

BY TIM JOHNSON

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MT. VERNON — Wilkey's Cafe is bringing its business back to Mt. Vernon Outland Airport.

Donnie Wilkey, owner of the long-established Belle Rive restaurant, will soon begin the process of opening his new location in the space formerly occupied by Grandma's Landing at the airport's Koziara Terminal. Grandma's Landing owner Joyce Gillespie officially retired at the end of March.

"I think we're going to get a marketability with Donnie," said Airport Director Chris Collins. "This is going to help us reach out and really go for cross-country fliers."

Collins said Wilkey's reputation for quality food plus his plans to keep the restaurant open for both lunch and dinner will help attract more pilots to the airport for a refuel and a good meal.

"He's open at night, and

he's open on Saturdays," Collins said. "Probably the biggest thing is that he has a quality, a reputation and an experience level that's unsurpassed. We've got that now to not only draw the aviators but also the townspeople. We're giving them another place to eat on the east side of town."

Wilkey's is set to open April 22 pending Tuesday approval by the Mt. Vernon Airport Authority, and Wilkey said he's eager to once again show Mt. Vernon what his restaurant has to offer. He had been established at the airport in the 1990s but was gone from the location for more than a decade.

"I'm bringing 58 years of business up there," he said. "I was really happy out there. It's an ideal place to have a restaurant."

Wilkey's Belle Rive location will temporarily close for repairs once the airport restaurant opens, but Wilkey said he expects to keep his business at both sites for now.

Business hours are tentatively planned for 11 a.m. to 6 or 7 p.m. on Tuesday through Sunday.

The variety of food at the new location will be similar to that of the Belle Rive restaurant, with a similar buffet arrangement. Wilkey's Friday Night Seafood, Saturday Night Steak and Sunday "After-Service" Buffet traditions will also continue in Mt. Vernon.

Wilkey's will also offer space for parties, banquets and other gatherings inside the terminal.

Collins said bringing Wilkey's to the airport is part of the Airport Authority's overarching goal to bring more people there through whatever means it can find.

"We're just excited," Collins said. "Donnie is a great fit to the team out here."

The airport restaurant will be closed for repairs and renovation until the scheduled opening day.

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