

Burger King, Brighton Collectibles landing at Port Columbus

Business First by Dan Eaton, Staff reporter

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Burger King is opening in a Port Columbus International Airport food court space that Wendy's once occupied.

A new burger chain and a new look for an existing burger chain are among the changes coming to the food and retail offerings at Port Columbus International Airport in 2012.

Burger King is taking over the food court space that was home to home-grown Wendy's, which vacated the airport last year, while Max & Erma's Restaurants Inc. will be shutting down temporarily for a renovation.

HMSHost Corp., the foodservice management company for the airport, will operate the Burger King, expected to open in the second quarter. Columbus Regional Airport Authority spokeswoman Angie Tabor said it was important to secure a familiar burger option to replace Wendy's in the pre-security food court.

Tabor said the airport tried to keep Wendy's, including offering space in Concourse A instead. But Port Columbus CEO Elaine Roberts, in an October board meeting, said the Wendy's operation was losing an estimated \$100,000 a year.

Max & Erma's, a pre-security fixture since 1997, will be closing in mid-January for its makeover. HMSHost also operates that restaurant. The renovations will bring the space in line with the Columbus-based chain's newest design, which can be seen at its Polaris area restaurant. It is expected to re-open in March.

Wendy's wasn't the only hometown brand to flee the airport last year. Bath & Body Works, a unit of Columbus-based Limited Brands Inc., left and is being replaced by Brighton Collectibles, also set to open in March. The accessory and jewelry retailer will be operated by Paradies Shops, an airport retail operator. Paradies plans to invest \$800,000 in the Brighton store and another \$700,000 in the additional retail spaces it operates in the airport.

Last year was a busy year for airport in dining and retail. Dublin-based Tim Hortons Inc. and Cold Stone Creamery came to the food court. Auntie Anne's Pretzels was added in Concourse B. Arrivederci, a bar, joined Concourse C, while Great American Bagel Co. relocated from the food court to that concourse. Best Buy Express kiosks also were added to all three concourses in 2010 and 2011.

There are no vacancies at the airport at this time, but that doesn't mean more restaurants and retailers aren't in the works.

"We're always looking to add more food and shopping choices," Tabor said. "We could use more options post-security."

She cited Concourse A as one area where new space could be created.