

Dining with dinosaurs at Disney

New themed restaurant signals a makeover for Pleasure Island.

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LAKE BUENA VISTA -- Plans to build two major themed restaurants at Walt Disney World may offer a peek behind the curtain of silence Disney has imposed on its plans to remake Pleasure Island.

T-Rex: A Prehistoric Family Adventure, opening in early 2008, is a 600-seat, dinosaur-themed establishment. It marks the next step in the company's plans for Downtown Disney, a 31-year-old restaurant/



T-Rex concept developer Steve Schussler with animated figure

retail center that occupies 120 acres.

Jacob DiPietre, a Disney spokesman, confirms the restaurant, to be located adjacent to Pleasure Island, will be a cornerstone of a makeover but would not elaborate about the project.

Landry's Restaurants Inc., which is based in Houston, will bear the cost of building a \$25 million T-Rex restaurant, paying Disney a fee to operate for 20 years. Landry's also plans to open a 600-seat, Asian-themed restaurant inside Animal Kingdom by summer 2007.

Landry's operates Rainforest Cafe locations at Downtown Disney, Disney's Animal Kingdom and Disney's California Adventure.

The T-Rex concept was developed by Steve Schussler, who founded the Rainforest Cafe chain that he sold to Landry's for \$85 million in 2000.

Tillman Fortito, Landry's chairman and chief executive officer, says his company is re-engineering Schussler's preliminary concepts to make them more efficient, similar to the retrofitting the company did after buying Rainforest from him.

"In Orlando, there will be less bar and more dining," he says, noting the Disney audience "isn't a drinking crowd."

Fortito, who says Landry's has had preliminary conversations with Disney about a second restaurant in California, adds that he would not have done the deal with Schussler without the Disney location.

'Huge' Disney makeover

Schussler believes the Pleasure Island makeover is designed to streamline customer flow, extend the amount of time visitors spend shopping, eating and nightclub hopping, and attract more family visits.

Schussler couldn't be too specific about Disney's plans, saying only that part of the work will involve changing the way traffic will flow.

"The (Disney) makeover project is very huge," says Schussler. "They have some very aggressive plans. The strength of the T-Rex project is one reason for their commitment."