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O.T. Hodge Chili returns to St. Louis

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Slingers officially are back on St. Louisans' menu, and Ferguson's Sportsprint building is occupied once again.

O.T. Hodge Chile Parlor, which originally opened during the 1904 World's Fair, re-opened June 1 in the Sportsprint building at 252 South Florissant Road in Ferguson. The building's owner, Joe Lonero, has nearly completed rehabbing the structure.

The last O.T. Hodge, in South St. Louis, closed about a year ago.

"We had one guy come down here from Springfield, Ill., for a slinger," said O.T. Hodge owner Joe Schaumberger. "He called to make sure we were open before he came. He was excited."

Slingers are two cheeseburger patties with hash browns and two eggs cooked to order, covered with O.T. Hodge's chili.

"That's our number one seller," Schaumberger said.

Seating options include booths, tables, stools at the counter and a couple of outdoor tables in back. Like the original O.T. Hodge restaurants, this one is red, white, black and chrome.

History is part of the reason Schaumberger decided to open an OT Hodge Chile Parlor.

"We feel like we can will pull people in from West County, South County and St. Charles," Schaumberger said. "I wanted something with a name, and O.T. Hodge is a great name."

Schaumberger is opening the restaurant with the help of his father, Rick Schaumberger, and his roommate, Jeff Clark.

"He was the sous chef at Squires," Schaumberger said of Clark. "When you're in charge of a production line at a restaurant, that's a lot of responsibility."

Schaumberger has been in the restaurant business for about 13 years. He has been a chef at Zuzu's Petals, Canyon Cafe and Squires.

There were many places he could have put the new diner, but decided on Ferguson.

"Ferguson has a small-town feel, and there's not a lot of competition," he said. "We're five minutes from UMSL, where there's 50,000 students. If you can't draw with all of those students so close by, you're doing something wrong."

The Sportsprint building was rehabbed using \$460,000 in tax increment financing funds. The city of Ferguson put up \$80,000 and will be reimbursed through the TIF. Lonero will be reimbursed \$380,000 on the rehab if the enough funds are generated by the businesses in the building within 10 years.

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