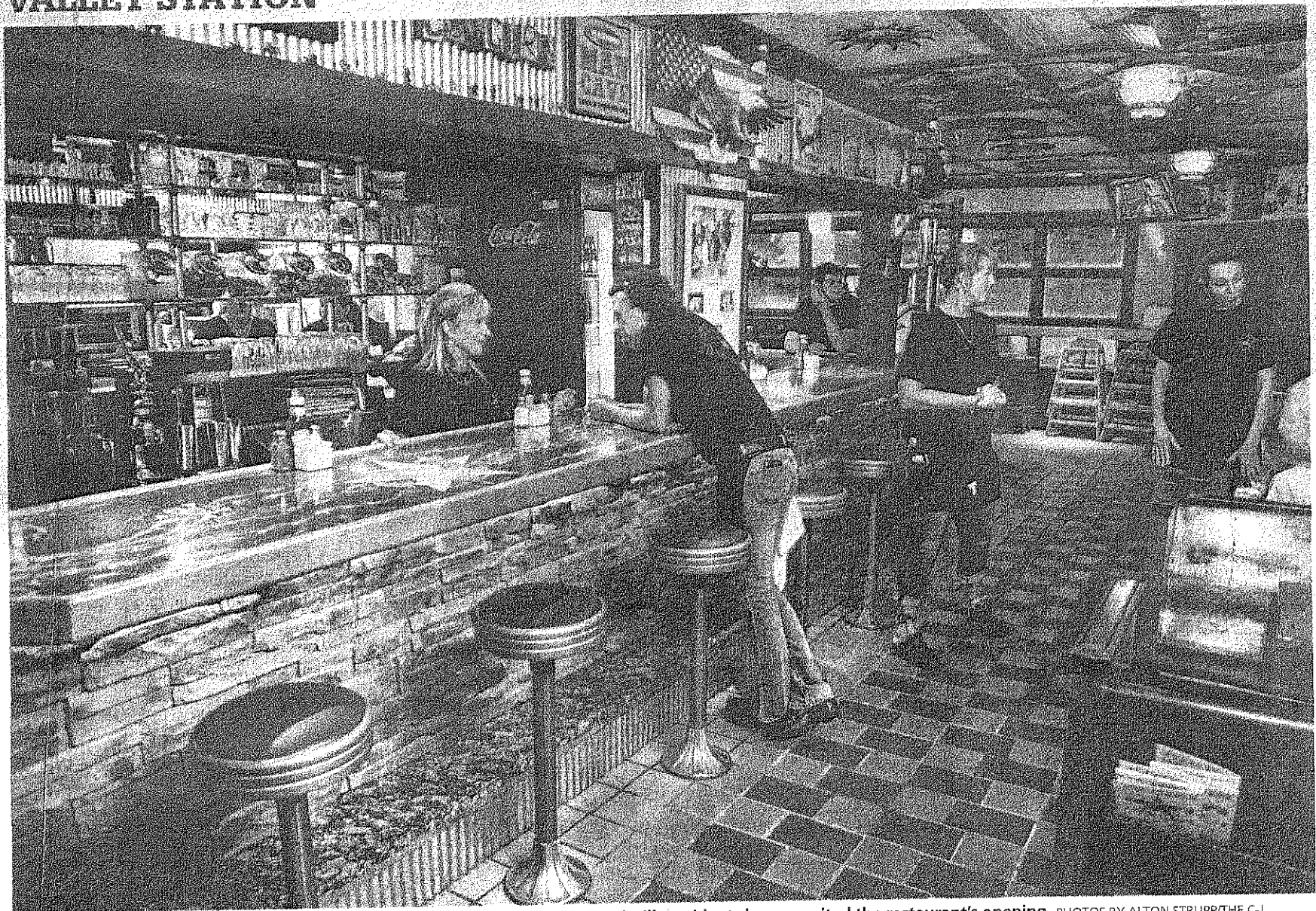


VALLEY STATION



Staff members get acclimated at Good Ole' Jessie's Dixie Diner. Southwest Louisville residents have awaited the restaurant's opening. PHOTOS BY ALTON STRUPP/THE C-J

DOORS OPEN AT JESSIE'S

Customers check out the new cool at the Dixie diner

By Bailey Loosemore

bioosemore@courier-journal.com
The Courier-Journal

Good Ole' Jessie's Dixie Diner's first customer of the day chatted with a waitress, coffee in hand, within minutes of the restaurant opening Wednesday. About a dozen employees flitted around the Dixie Highway building — reviewing the menu, readying dishes in the kitchen, sitting down for breakfast themselves.

Kirsten Ash, on her first shift, stood behind two of her co-workers, each wrapping silverware in a paper napkin. "Will y'all teach me how to roll?"

"Sure, this is the easiest thing you'll learn all day," Holly Watkins said.

Watkins gave Ash tips — check for dishwasher residue — before leading her to their next lesson: how to set up tables so that other waitresses know your customers are being served.

The employees had time for short lessons while customers took up only a handful of the restaurant's 111 seats.

Diner owner Tom Whitted placed a large, white banner reading "Now Open" in front of the parking lot Tuesday, and so far, a few hundred residents have taken notice.

Business was relatively slow Tuesday and



Owner Tom Whitted goes over table assignments with waitresses, from left, Michelle Duggins, Holly Watkins, and Kirsten Ash.

GOOD OLE' JESSIE'S DIXIE DINER

The restaurant, at 9609 Dixie Highway, opened Tuesday and will have a grand opening ceremony at 5 p.m. today. For more information, go to www.facebook.com/goodolejessies.

Wednesday mornings, but Whitted said it picked up by dinnertime Tuesday and more than 350 people were served by closing. He expects the restaurant to be filled Friday for its grand opening, with Mayor Greg Fischer speaking at 5 p.m.

Southwest Louisville residents have patiently awaited the restaurant's opening since Whitted bought it in October. They remember when it was Jessie's Family Restaurant, owned by Miss Jean Jessie, and how it became rundown after she left.

From 1974 to 2002, when Miss Jessie ran it, the restaurant was a staple in the community, a place for people young and old to meet for breakfast and stay for conversation.

Whitted wants the restaurant to still be a place for families, but he wants the new Jessie's to be remembered for his spin on it.

At the bar, a picture of Miss Jessie above her last dollar in business hangs over a painted sign displaying Whitted's personal motto, "My kind of cool."

Whitted originally wanted to open this spring but held off as he completed the near-complete overhaul.

"There are only two things left: the tile and the phone number," said waitress Donna Browning, who worked at the restaurant after Miss Jessie owned it.

After it closed, she moved to Terri Ann's Kitchen, owned by a former Jessie's kitchen manager, but was jobless once that closed too. When she heard Jessie's was opening under a new owner, she jumped at the chance to again work at the restaurant she loved.

"I was up here trying to get a spot like a horse

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DINER: Good Ole' Jessie's opens on Dixie

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in a race," she said.

Most customers Wednesday morning were visiting the remodeled restaurant for the first time, but a few were already new-Jessie's regulars, by some standards.

Travis Cook and Jay Kelly of Pleasure Ridge Park sat in repurposed church pews for their second visit in two days. Cook said the food and prices were good, so they decided to try it again.

"And they asked us to come back," Kelley joked. "Nobody's done that."

On the other side of a wall, Margaret and Marshall Moore finished

their waffles and eggs. The couple moved to Louisville in 1978 and frequented the diner when Miss Jessie owned it.

"Jessie's was more of a family restaurant," Margaret Moore said. "This is a little more hip."

The couple live about 2 miles away and drove by daily to see when the restaurant would open. They said they like the atmosphere — though a little too noisy — and the food — though a little too pricey.

Whitted said it'll take time to work out the kinks, but he's hopeful the community will respond well.

"It takes time. Cool takes time," he said. "When they come in and see it, they'll be blown away."

Reporter Bailey Loosemore can be reached at (502) 582-4646. Follow her on Twitter at @bloosemore.