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Friendly's debuts smaller restaurant with limited menu

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The first Friendly's Express has opened in Mansfield. Customers will order at the counter from a limited menu, and employees will bring food to the table in less than 10 minutes.

It's a few notches above fast food, with a more limited menu than at a traditional Friendly's - the kind of dining a customer would find at a Panera Bread bakery cafe, for example.

The new restaurant, with just 40 seats, will also put a bigger emphasis on take-out orders for busy customers.

"This is all about speed and portability," said Jim Sullivan, Friendly's vice president of franchising and development. "Consumers today don't have time for a sit-down experience."

The 2,200 s/f restaurant is about one-third smaller than a typical Friendly's.

Dennis Lombardi, executive vice president at the consultancy WD Partners, said it makes sense for Friendly's to enter this type of restaurant operation, but the chain will need to prove it has something unique to offer.

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