

'Joe' to be on the go

Facility is moving to former bank site

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When Community & Family Services first opened Joe on the Go in May 2016, it knew the Meridian Street location was a "test kitchen" to gauge community interest.

The response outgrew the drive-up trailer.

When MainSource Bank, 1511 N. Meridian St., closed, an expansion opportunity was born. Tom Oliver, interim executive director of Community & Family Services, knew certain organizations contribute former buildings to non-profits. So, the organization reached out to new owner First Financial Bank in Cincinnati, Ohio.

A couple of months later, Oliver and his team got the call: Joe on the Go had acquired a permanent location in Portland, equipped with a drive-thru, lobby space and free Wi-Fi.



Employees from First Financial Bank turned over the financial institution's north location in Portland to Community & Family Services during a ceremony last month. CFS plans to use the building as a permanent location for Joe on the Go, with drive-up coffee service to be available in a couple of weeks and food to follow by the end of the year. (The Commercial Review/Jack Ronald)

"It was their way of saying, 'Hey, you know, we believe in ... your program and organization,'" Oliver said. "It was just their way of giving back to Jay County because, you know, they didn't want to see the building sit there empty, waiting for whatever to take place."

Although the organization officially acquired the building Aug. 30, Oliver said coffee lovers will have to wait a couple more weeks before Joe on the Go's drive-thru opens. Once it opens, Oliver said an app will launch to allow customers to order and pay for coffee and pick it up in the drive-thru.

"We're going to do this in phases. Phase one is we just want to get the drive-thru opened, especially before the weather gets here," Oliver said.

Once phase one is complete, Oliver said Community & Family Services plans to finish the lobby and expand the menu to include lunch and dinner items. Although Oliver said it's a "loose" deadline, the lobby is slated for completion in November.

"The purpose behind the program (at Community & Family Services) is to provide resources to individuals who had limited resources or limited means," Oliver said. "So, with coffee we realized we were allowed to go from four baristas up to, I think we're at 10 now, I believe, in Portland and 15, roughly, in Upland.

"Well, we figured if we add food to it — first of all, there's a need for it in Jay County where there's a nice sit-down restaurant. Then the other part is, of course, it allows us to hire more individuals to work here."

As for expanding to include lunch and dinner, Oliver said the menu will feature lighter fare like salads and sandwiches. Though Oliver said he's not 100 percent sure, he hopes to serve food before Thanksgiving.

Along with a menu expansion, Oliver said the location plans to offer doughnuts and possibly other baked goods, but the coffee will remain the same.

"Really it's going to be the same, just a new location," Oliver said. "This is going to give everyone an opportunity to come in, relax, enjoy the Wi-Fi, listen to some music and have coffee or have lunch or dinner, as time goes on."

The famous trailer isn't disappearing anytime soon, though. Oliver said he hopes to use the "test kitchen" facility to open a location in one of the other four counties Community & Family Services serves. If the process goes smoothly, he said, a new location could open within a year.

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