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Weather: No relief in sight as the forecast calls for hot and sunny conditions to continue throughout the weekend. Clear and breezy today with a high of 100 (38C). Slight chance of thunderstorms this evening with a low of 70 (21C). Sunny and hot this weekend with highs reaching near 100 (38C) and lows in the lower 70s (22C).

Barb Branda/The Nebraskan

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Not all Legoons are blue...Page 6



Chris Medley/The Nebraskan

24-hour restaurants

One foot in the grave(yard shift)

By Lise Olsen
Senior Reporter

It's too late for the late night drive-through. It's too early to stomach a micro-waved quick grocery burrito. Late-nighters who know their options haven't given up. Twenty-four hour restaurants await with full menus, full service and fulfillment.

The weary travelers, sleepy square dancers, ravenous roadrunners and the boisterous bar crowds commonly descend on the "always open" eateries during the "graveyard shift" (11 p.m.-6 a.m.).

Denny's, a twenty-four hour restaurant chain has been around since 1954. There are 1,102 Denny's in 44 states, 220 in Japan, 18 in Mexico, 11 in Canada, six in Australia, and one in Lincoln.

The busiest Denny's are in California

and Florida. Senior Vice President of Operations Howard Massey said in a telephone interview.

However, late-night crowds are smaller than they once were because of stiffer drunk driving laws, Massey said.

"People are not out early mornings like that, drinking and carousing like they used to."

In 1954, Denny's started with a "donut concept", and lots of pink and orange decor. Now Denny's is the largest privately owned restaurant chain in the United States, Massey said.

Perkins, 2900 N.W. 12th St., was remodeled last November. The change has boosted business and attracted a better clientele, Jim Aswegan, general manager said.

At Perkins, 28 to 35 percent of their business is at night, Aswegan said. There are two late night "rushes," one

at 10 p.m. to midnight and one at 1:30-3 a.m., known as the "bar rush."

One-thirty to 3 a.m. customers are often loud, rowdy and drunk, Aswegan said.

Although they yell and sometimes throw food, late night customers are usually more polite and easier to please, waitress Cyndi Halpin said.

"If you screw up they don't mind as much," Halpin said. "Once a whole plate of stuff fell on the floor — and they laughed."

Halpin, a junior business major, works at Country Kettle near east campus.

Halpin likes working at night, when she can, because the pace is slower and the customers like to have fun.

But working all night during the weekends and going to school Monday mornings can be tiring she said. She once discovered a co-worker with her

head down on the break table. Occasionally a customer will fall asleep.

"Dunks will pass out," Aswegan said. "That's no big deal unless they're sleeping in their food or something."

Night customers usually eat more and tip better, Halpin said.

"Then some people come in and they're digging for nickels and dimes to see what they can buy," Halpin said.

Occasionally they don't pay at all. "Dine and dash" (trying to sneak out without paying) is a game for some people, Aswegan said.

Aswegan's biggest problem as a 24-hour restaurant manager is finding late night employees.

"We hire more people for the graveyard than any other shift," Aswegan said.

It's also tough to find managers for late night hours, Massey said.

Before a new Denny's manager goes to work, he or she goes through a five-week training program that includes "real life" restaurant crises.

"Anything you can imagine happening on a 24-hour basis," Massey said.

After eight years of restaurant managing, Aswegan has just about seen it all: food fights, practical jokes, sick, wandering drunk sleeping customers and disappearing silverware.

In a 30 day period three to five dozen pieces of silverware and about two dozen salt and pepper shakers turn up missing at Perkins, Aswegan said.

Despite the drawbacks, Lincoln's 24-hour restaurant business is healthy and will probably continue to grow, Aswegan said. Perkins plans to open a second Lincoln store in early September at 48th and O streets.