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Times staff photo by ALEXANDER ALEMAN

A TRIBUTE TO SUCCESS: Local Danny's Restaurant owner Danny Lopez plans to franchise his restaurant chain along the U.S.-Mexico border and throughout the country.

Franchise with Danny's owner plans expansion

by **GILBERT VILLARREAL**
Times staff writer

Specially seasoned enchiladas, flavorful chilaquiles and a variety of other Mexican-style foods at Danny's Restaurant could soon be a staple in places as far away as Detroit and Florida.

This popular local restaurant chain is now franchising throughout Texas and the U.S., according to owner Danny Lopez – a tribute to the success of his restaurants locally and in Brownsville.

Lopez attributes the success of his restaurant chain to seven years of personal attention, consistency, hard work and know-how, as well as special attention to the flavorings used in his food.

"Of top priority has been the special seasoning used in our local Tex-Mex recipes," Lopez said.

To identify the unique Tex-Mex flavor that has made South Texas so famous, a series of ingredients unique to Tex-Mex cooking are used by his cooks, Lopez claimed.

"Just to give an example, the way Danny's cooks enchiladas is with specially seasoned chili con carne ingredients, making this dish quite appetizing," he said. "The same is true for our breakfast and lunch specials; machacado con huevo, chorizo con huevo, western omelet,

papas con chorizo y rajitas, crispy beef tacos, Texas special fajitas and arracheras."

Although Lopez admitted that the border communities have a natural liking for these dishes, he said that they seem to be very attractive to everyone that wants good Tex-Mex food.

Each dish has been carefully evaluated for its nutritional content, and his cooks use low-fat and low cholesterol ingredients. The objective is to serve an appetizing dish that contributes to a well balanced diet.

Lopez said that he has received serious inquiries from the Rio Grande Valley, Florida, California, Chicago and Detroit for Danny's franchises. The communities in these areas really enjoy the famous Tex-Mex cuisine, he said.

Each franchise will have Danny's secret cookery formulas and specially trained personnel, from the master chef to the manager.

Lopez noted that "at this time the Texas and national franchise campaign is at its initial stages, with phase one to cover the entire U.S.-Mexico border, from Brownsville to San Diego."

Efforts are also being focused to set up franchises in the Houston, Dallas and San Antonio areas.

The franchises will not only be for Danny's (See *DANNY'S Page 23)

Battling politics, arena picks up local support

by **ELIZABETH PEASE**
LMTBusiness writer

"I have had some tough tackles in my time -- Walter Payton and Eric Dickerson come to mind -- but never have I tackled anything as tough as Laredo politics."

So said Kiki DeAyala, president of Arena Ventures, speaking at the June

20 meeting of the Laredo Manufacturers Association about the proposed entertainment facility.

DeAyala, a former defensive end for the University of Texas and the NFL's Cincinnati Bengals, told a genial audience that the campaign to pass the quarter-cent sales tax was up and running at full speed.

"The TV ads are up on the air and we

are getting a positive response to our newspaper ads and Website," he said. "Based on our polling, we think we have a good chance to win the election on Aug. 12," he said.

DeAyala said that the proposed arena has been picking up support from high profile figures around town. Comments following DeAyala's talk reflected the trend. Jeff Jones with Gunn Financial

said he was very positive about the idea.

"I grew up playing hockey," Jones said. "Anyone who has ever seen it live loves the game. I think the entertainment center is good business for the city. Laredo is growing and quality of life is an increasingly important issue. The entertainment (See *ARENA Page 19)

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Texas Agriculture Commissioner brings her message to local ranchers.



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Border

New subdivision offers modern amenities at an affordable price.



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now, and we do everything you can do through the online banking," she said. "We can take loan applications, telephone transfers if you have more than one account – it's complete banking on the phone."

Kostopoulos explained another option for Internet users who prefer a more personal touch. "Soon we will be able to interact real time with people we need to contact on the Web."

For example, questions about banking transactions can be handled by going to the Web site and clicking on a "talk live" button. A teller would then respond to your request by voice, or even visually, live over your computer. Kostopoulos reiterated that the technology currently exists.

"It is just a question of fear. Once people get over their fear, all of these technologies can be implemented rapidly," he said.

Kostopoulos said that it will be several more years before the technology is fully accepted.

"There is a 'digital divide' between those people who accept technology and those who disdain it," he said.

He said it will be those born in the 1980s and later who will fully accept and be comfortable with the world of e-commerce. After all, Amazon.com is still a novelty and has yet to make a profit. But one can point and click and be in book cyber-heaven.

"We are not at the stage where we will be living like The Jetsons any time soon," he said. "But I do foresee a future in which university education is free — phone calls already are," Kostopoulos says.

Asked how free education would be paid for, he turns again toward the pulsating screen and brings up a Web site where telephone calls are free.

"This is how we will pay for it," he said, pointing to the advertising plastered all over the page. "It will be just like TV, all we pay for is the set.

Commercials pay for the rest."

What about privacy on the net?

"Well, for all intents and purposes we gave up our privacy a long time ago," he said. "Anybody who thinks that [the movie] *Enemy of the State* can't happen isn't paying attention," he said.

"We can't prevent a *Brave New World*. Abuse of power happens, has always happened and will always happen," he said, hastening to add that all of his students also take instruction in ethics and the information revolution. He hopes to instill ethical behavior in students under his tutelage.

During the last several years, one question has consistently plagued the purveyors of the technological revolution, from Bill Gates to Al Gore: How will the underprivileged and those who don't have the money for personal computers and other high-tech items benefit and participate in the information super highway? Kostopoulos offered one possible solution.

"Even in some of the poorest areas, there are televisions," he said. "Very soon the technology of personal computing and television will converge in a much more sophisticated way than WebTV."

According to Kostopoulos, soon, anyone who has a TV will have access to everything on the Web, including e-commerce and university education.

"The world will be more egalitarian, not less," he maintained, saying that he does not foresee the "social polarization" forecasted by Luddites.

And what is Laredo's role in all of this? Kostopoulos is bullish on Laredo.

"We are a breeding ground for technical wizards," he said, noting proudly that several students from TAMIU are interning and working for high tech companies in Austin and Seattle.

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*Danny's

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restaurants but will include Laredo's La Roca Seafood restaurants, which are also owned and operated by Lopez with admirable success.

Currently there are seven Danny's restaurants, six in the Laredo area and one in Brownsville, Lopez said. Laredo is also home to two La Roca Seafood restaurants.

The most recent Danny's

restaurant opened in early February at the 9700 block of McPherson. This particular Danny's will be the prototype for all the franchised units that will extend across the U.S.

For the convenience of the community, the Danny's at San Bernardo and Chicago is opened 24 hours a day, while the rest close at midnight.

*Group

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than 16 months ago.

RDFC provided \$250,000 for land acquisition in a local/state/ federal partnership that is constructing affordable housing for the devastated community.

RDFC has provided and administered more than \$11.5 million in loans and grants to businesses and community-based organizations in 21 states,

including Texas.

It has also leveraged outside resources from private foundations, corporations and the federal government to secure project financing for 93 projects that have created more than 2,500 commercial and industrial jobs.

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*Future

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Texas has a good relationship with Mexico. Our border congressmen have also shown great sensitivity. We hope that efforts like the Future of the Region conferences can be used to help them elevate

the discussions about the importance of the border region to the entire United States."

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*Booming

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rooms on the main drag, at the southern stretches of Guerrero-Reforma. Another hospitality project is the 120-room Garden Inn Hilton.

Another growth sector is twin-plant activity. Palos Morales said several maquilas have expanded to include additional plants or expansion of existing operations. He said the twin-plant operations remain one of Nuevo Laredo's key sources of employment and payrolls.

Palos Morales said the thousands of men and women who work in maquilas buy goods and services in Nuevo Laredo and Laredo as homeowners and taxpayers.

"They represent a sizable element of buying power for goods and services. They bank on both sides of the border, buy on both sides of the border and spend money on both sides as well."

Palos Morales said land and

land use have become factors in the town's economic and infrastructure development. He said investors work with the public sector in the development of industrial parks in the outer fringes of the city. He said this development continues to impact the city's ability to provide all kinds of services, primarily utility services.

He said Nuevo Laredo is home for thousands of mom-and-pop shops throughout the city. Palos Morales said this growth poses problems for regulatory and enforcement sectors of municipal government. However, he said local government is constantly adding more personnel and providing training to make enforcement more efficient and accountable, thereby enhancing public safety.

A shortage of housing, nevertheless, continues to plague the city. He said the city estimates a housing deficit of

approximately 20,000 units and that Nuevo Laredo's joint public-private ventures are cutting away at that deficit at the rate of 7,000 to 8,000 units a year.

"The growth is phenomenal," Palos Morales said. "People are constantly drawn to the border in search of better things. And that means primarily employment and the opportunity to buy a piece of land."

State and federal government play major roles in working with municipal government in dealing with the housing shortages. Palos Morales said housing is a problem in the inner city as well as the suburban parts of the Nuevo Laredo metropolitan area. He said the city continues to grow in all directions, primarily upriver in the areas linked to the international trade traffic generated by the World Trade and Laredo-Colombia

Solidarity international spans.

Palos Morales said the developments to the west and northwest stretches of the city are within the service areas of basic services such as water, power and sanitary sewer.

He added that land now under municipal control previously had been abandoned and unclaimed under a communal system. He said the city has been reclaiming land in the fringes to make the acreage available for both private and public housing developments.

Similar programs have been put in place in rural areas of Mexican border states where land-grant owners in communes abandoned properties that in many instances were taken over by squatters.

A land-use managing group, Consejo Administrador y Promotor de Reservas Territoriales, makes land

available for residential and commercial development in these recovered areas.

For instance, in a former commune, El Progreso, families have already settled in 374 sites under the VivAn 99 housing program. The program calls for the construction of 1,460 family dwellings in the current year. Lot sizes are contained to 200 square meters. Applicants must show proof of employment or a source of income, a birth certificate, voter registration card, personal references and be a resident of Nuevo Laredo for at least one year.

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