

Rocky Mountain News

Growth predicted for Colo. restaurants

Population gain, income expected to aid industry

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Colorado restaurant sales likely will grow at the third-fastest pace in the nation next year, according to the industry's annual forecast.

The state's population gains, as well as its high ranking for disposable income, will buoy eateries during a tough economy because both factors have a strong influence on restaurant growth.

Slightly higher prices for menu items could also contribute to an expected sales boost of 3.4 percent to \$8.4 billion in 2009, according to the survey from the National Restaurant Association.

"Colorado restaurants will fare much better than restaurants in most other states in 2009," said Peter Meersman, president of the Colorado Restaurant Association. "While most of this growth will be fueled by modest menu price increases, we are better off than 46 other states."

The data showed Texas posting the fastest sales growth, followed by Nevada.

The report tied Colorado's expected gains to forecasts for the state's disposable income to increase by 1.4 percent in Colorado. The state's population also is expected to increase by 1.4 percent, which would tie for eighth highest in the nation.

So-called fast casual restaurants such as those franchised by Denver-based Quiznos are helping to fuel growth, according to restaurant consultant William H. Bender.

He predicted that falling gasoline prices would encourage people to continue traveling and dining out, even during the economic downturn.

The report included data showing Colorado would experience a smaller payroll decrease than most other states even though 49 states will likely experience job losses.

Top five states for sales growth in 2009

- 1 Texas 4.0 percent to \$35 billion
- 2 Nevada 3.5 percent to \$5.2 billion
- 3 Colorado 3.4 percent to \$8.4 billion
- 4 New Mexico 3.3 percent to \$2.7 billion
- 5 Arizona 3.2 percent to \$8.7 billion

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