



Panera offers Internet access, office environment for free

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One of the newest locations of Panera, a restaurant known for its bread made fresh daily, is providing business customers with a place — and the means — to work away from the office.

“It’s a nice thing to be able to do,” said Brett Berger, information technology support person for the franchise. “You can check e-mail or conduct business away from the office.”

“You don’t have to know anything about the system,” said Jeff Rains, franchise president. “It’s a very easy thing to use.”

The Panera is on Hamilton Road, just north of Morse Road. It opened in April with a wireless fidelity computer network that allows users of laptops equipped with a wireless card to access the Internet using a radio signal.

The service is free, Rains said.

“We’re putting it in all of our locations,” he said. “Some companies

are doing this as a subscription-based system in which you pay by the hour. This is free. You don’t have to log in.”

Berger said Panera also maintains a technical support system for its customers, so they can call in between 9 a.m. and 10 p.m. if there is a problem with the Internet connection.

He said a fire wall was installed to protect customers’ privacy.

“I think that’s excellent. More and more people have started doing business while eating. They can get their appointments and check e-mail,” said Eileen Leuby, president of the New Albany Area Chamber of Commerce.

Leuby said many people have a wireless system on their laptop computers that allows them to work away from the office. She also commended Panera for its forward thinking.

“Businesses on the cutting edge are coming up with creative ways to attract customers,” she said.

The new Panera location is 5,000

square feet and includes the customary Panera bread, baked fresh daily, and special coffees imported from Costa Rica.

It all adds to the welcoming atmosphere that invites customers to use Panera as more than a restaurant, Rains said. Many of their customers use Panera as a meeting place and second office. He said sometimes it’s nice not to have to be in the office, and Panera also can provide a neutral meeting place for business associates.

“Sometimes, informal business meetings just happen here,” he said.

Rains, who is the president of a franchise including stores in Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, Denver and Colorado Springs, said he chose the New Albany location because of growth in the area.

“We’ve been looking for a location in New Albany for years,” Rains said. “We decided to go where the neighborhood shops and services are.”

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