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Iconic Chicago restaurant Portillo's picks first Texas city for D-FW expansion

Portillo's CEO also corrects a point of confusion: "It is not a hot dog place," he says.



Portillo's is best known for its Italian beef sandwich, says Michael Osanloo. He grew up in a suburb of Chicago and remembers eating Portillo's as a kid. Today, he's the CEO.

By [Sarah Blaskovich](#)

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Texas' first Portillo's restaurant is expected to open in late 2022 in The Colony, in Warren Buffett's [Grandscape development](#) next to Nebraska Furniture Mart on State Highway 121.

Portillo's CEO Michael Osanloo confirmed the location to *The Dallas Morning News*. He's aware that the famous Chicago chain has plenty of fans who were curious about the expansion after it was mysteriously reported in October 2021 that the [Chicago chain would open "in a town near Frisco next year."](#) The Colony is Frisco's neighbor to the south.

Portillo's in The Colony will be the first in Texas, though Osanloo says the company plans to focus on significant expansion in the Lone Star State. He hopes to have 18 to 20 restaurants in Dallas-Fort Worth in five years.

'It is not a hot dog place'

While Portillo's sells Chicago-style hot dogs, Osanloo says the drive-through, quick-service spot is more than that.



While Portillo's hot dogs are iconic — and while Portillo's was started in 1963 as a hot dog stand — its CEO today says the Italian beef sandwiches are more of their "thing."

"It is not a hot dog place," he says. "It is an Italian beef place. If people are coming to Portillo's and they're eating one thing, I'd say get a beef sandwich. It'll blow your mind."

Their Italian beef is slow-roasted in a spiral oven, then thinly shaved and warmed in a bath of au jus. "There's an art to how you make this sandwich," says Osanloo, the former CEO of P.F. Chang's.

Each Italian beef sandwich is served on French bread, then dunked back in the au jus — which they call gravy.

"It's a hot mess. Dripping, and everywhere," he says.

The second-best thing on the menu, if you ask the CEO, is Portillo's crinkle-cut fries. They're cooked in beef tallow.

Hot dogs land as Osanloo's third-favorite item. And they make 'em different than we do in Texas: A Chicago-style hot dog comes with onions, pickle relish, tomatoes, mustard ("and we make fun of people who put ketchup on it," the CEO says), a wedge of dill pickle ("it's got to be the whole wedge"), celery salt, and two sport peppers. The dog is served on a poppy seed bun.

And like the Italian beef sandwich, the hot dog is also a messy, two-handed affair.

Osanloo grew up in Naperville, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. After he got his driver's license, he says the first place he drove was to Portillo's. And what did he eat back then? *Two* beef sandwiches with hot peppers and a large fry.



For about \$10, customers can get a burger, fries and soda at Portillo's. The burger is another popular menu item, the CEO says.

How Texas was already No. 1

Osanloo took Portillo's public in October 2021, and he said at the time that it's "a first step in a journey," even though the restaurant already came with 59 years of Chicago history.

Today, Portillo's has grown to 70 restaurants in nine states. None of those states are close to Texas.

Portillo's chocolate cake shake is made with half-slice of chocolate cake and ice cream. (Studio Capture Station 1)

And yet, Texas is the company's No. 1 state for the ["shop and ship" program](#), which mails Italian beef sandwich fixins and Chicago-style hot dog ingredients in bulk across the country.

Osanloo says the Grandscape development has bigger-in-Texas flair. (And it does: It's the [biggest restaurant village in North Texas](#).) Osanloo likes the mix of local and not-local restaurants alongside mega retail like Scheel's and Nebraska Furniture Mart.



Osanloo is also aware of the [1,200-person Facebook group](#) begging Portillo's to come to D-FW. He says the iconic Italian beef chain is prepared to join a competitive North Texas market, where [Gordon Ramsay just moved his North American restaurant headquarters](#) to Irving, and chain restaurants like TGI Fridays, Pizza Hut and Chili's take up residence here.

But can he make hot dogs work in Texas, after Luscher's Red Hots, Jerry's Wood-Fired Dogs and Wild About Harry's didn't make it here?

"If you don't do a good job in Texas, Texas will shut you down like that," Osanloo says, snapping his fingers.

"I think we're up to that challenge."

Plus, as he says: It's not just a hot dog place.

Portillo's will be at 4560 Destination Dr., The Colony. They have not broken ground yet, but they expect construction to be finished and for the restaurant to open in the fourth quarter of 2022.