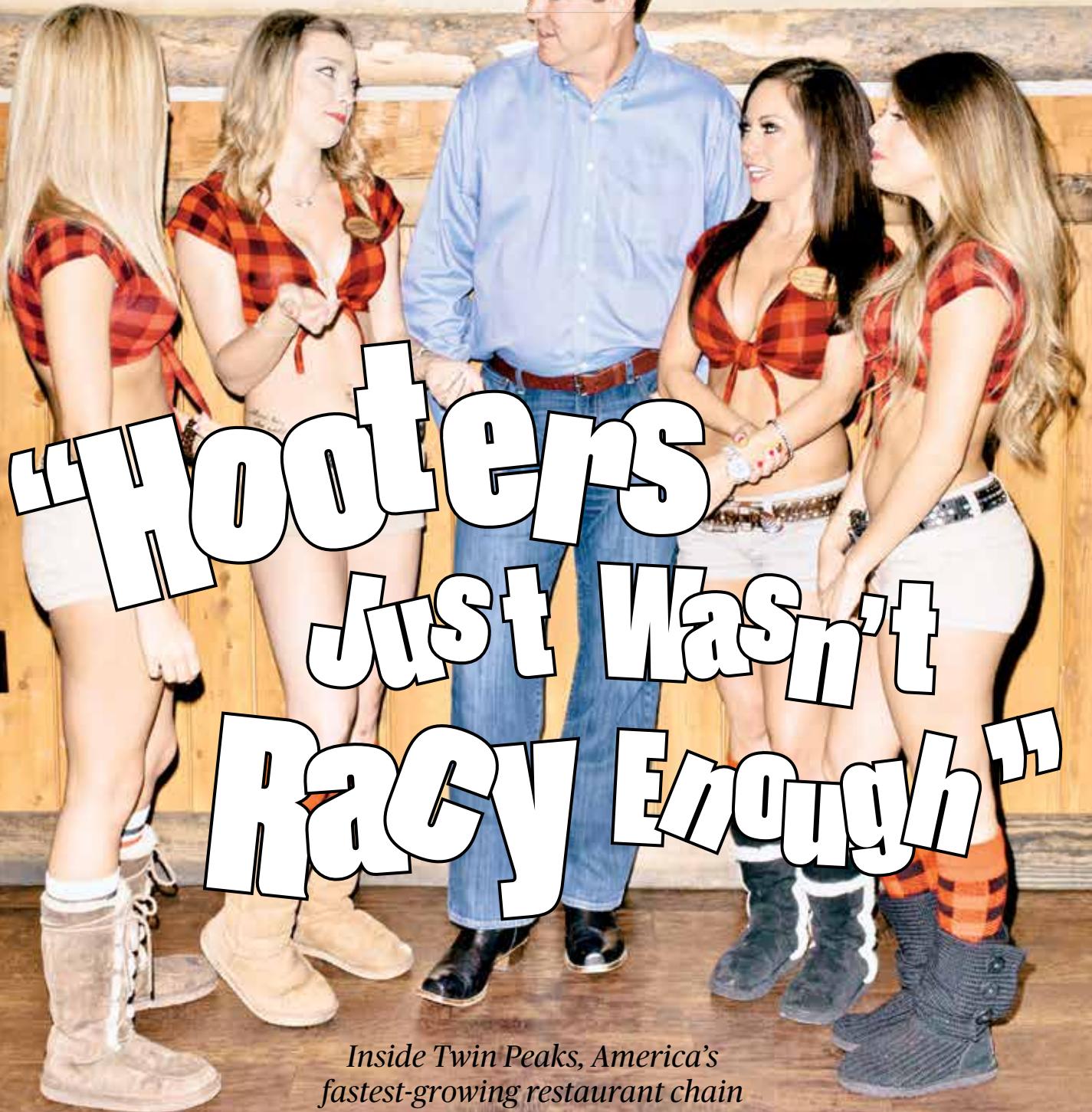


# ETG



CEO Randy DeWitt, surrounded by Twin Peaks waitresses

*Inside Twin Peaks, America's fastest-growing restaurant chain*  
By Devin Leonard

Photographs by Harry Gould Harvey IV

**B**efore each shift at Twin Peaks, a Hooters-like restaurant with 57 locations across the U.S., managers line up waitresses and grade them on their looks. The women get points for hair, makeup, slenderness, and the cleanliness of their uniforms: fur-lined boots, khaki hot pants, and skimpy plaid tops that accentuate their cleavage. Their job, between serving sports-bar fare with names such as “well-built sandwiches” and “smokin’ hot dishes,” is to beguile the mostly male customers, flirting to get them to empty their wallets. They may also have to fend off patrons who’ve washed down too many of the house beers, including the Dirty Blonde or the Knotty Brunette.

Twin Peaks is the most successful example of a new generation of restaurants, what people in the industry euphemistically refer to as “the attentive service sector” or, as they’re more casually known, “breastaurants.” Twin Peaks Chief Executive Officer Randy DeWitt doesn’t care much for the word, not that he’s complaining. Last year, Twin Peaks was the fastest-growing chain in the U.S., with \$165 million in sales.

On a recent Friday at lunchtime, men fill almost every table at the Twin Peaks in Addison, Texas. Most of them are more preoccupied with their servers than the sports programming on the numerous flatscreen TVs. I’m dining here today with DeWitt, a tall, 56-year-old who laments his paunch. Our waitress is Courtney Freeman, a 20-year-old with platinum blond hair parted on the side. “Hell-ooo, how are you?” she greets us. “My name is Courtney. I’m your Twin Peaks girl today.”

We order two Dirty Blondes. Freeman turns to leave.

“Wait, wait. Ask the question,” DeWitt says. He explains to the waitress that I’ve never been to a Twin Peaks before.

Freeman seems confused. “OK. Why have you never been to Twin Peaks before?” she asks.

“No, not that question,” DeWitt interrupts. “So he’s ordering a beer...”

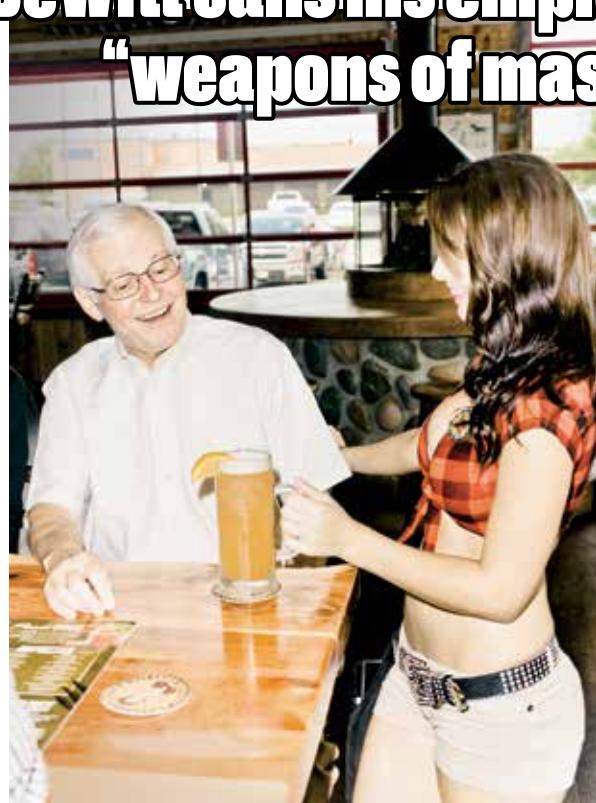
“Oh!” Freeman says. “Do you want the man size or the girl size?”

I assure her the smaller size is fine, but she isn’t easily dissuaded. “Are you sure?” she asks, leaning in closer. “It’s a little, 10-ounce baby beer.”

DeWitt conceived of Twin Peaks in 2005 as a challenger to Hooters, the original breastaurant, which was founded in 1983 by six buddies in Clearwater, Fla. Today there are 360 Hooters in the U.S., generating \$828 million in sales last year, according to data from Technomic, a food industry consultant. But what was salacious three decades ago has now become family-friendly; it’s not unusual to see children at Hooters, doodling in coloring books. And compared with the clothes at some popular teen retailers, Hooter’s white tank tops and orange shorts seem almost demure. Last year, sales at the chain were virtually flat.

That’s created opportunities for smaller competitors willing to exhibit more of the female anatomy. The largest, Tilted Kilt Pub & Eatery, a Tempe (Ariz.)-based chain founded in 2003, did \$196 million in sales last year. Tilted Kilt has 91 restaurants across the country. Its waitresses labor in what might be

DeWitt calls his employees  
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Far left: A patron is served a man-size beer. Above: Freeman.



described as provocative Celtic garb. “Our costumes are a short kilt and halter top and a swimsuit-type bra that goes underneath that halter-type top,” explains Ron Lynch, Tilted Kilt’s CEO. The house specialty is the Big Arse Burger.

The average Twin Peaks generates \$3.6 million a year—\$1 million more than the typical Tilted Kilt or Hooters. DeWitt attributes this to his menu, which is a little more ambitious than those of his rivals. Twin Peaks makes its food from scratch and serves beer at near-freezing temperatures, he says. “If you can deliver a beer in August with ice crystals on it every single time, that’s something special.”

Darren Tristano, executive vice president of Technomic, says the success of Twin Peaks has more to do with the chain’s waitresses than its standard pub food. “The results at Twin Peaks are higher because of the sexual appeal of its servers,” he says. “The customers, who are almost entirely male, make their decision based on that.”

DeWitt grew up in Dallas and, after a stint in the Air Force, moved to Washington, D.C., where he worked at a real estate firm that leased space in shopping malls to chains such as Applebee’s. When his employer was sold in 1993, he went back to his hometown and started a chain of seafood restaurants called the Rockfish Grill. The eateries prospered, except for one in Lewisville, Texas. “I surveyed the area,” DeWitt says. “I realized, ‘OK, the, Macaroni Grill isn’t doing well, TGI Fridays isn’t doing what it’s used to, Bennigan’s is suffering.’” The exception was the local Hooters.

So in 2005, DeWitt decided to transform the Lewisville Rockfish Grill into an upscale version of Hooters. He’d offer a more satisfying menu and a full bar and give his place a trendier, rustic theme. (He’s a fan of the David Lynch television series from the early 1990s but says it had nothing to do with the name of his restaurant.) Perhaps most important, DeWitt felt Twin

a brain-numbing temperature. The chain gets the waitresses discounts at gyms, tanning joints, and nail salons. It gives them tips on styling their hair and using makeup and offers them a diet menu to keep them from gaining weight. The best performers are invited to pose, in some cases topless, for the annual Twin Peaks calendar. DeWitt calls his employees “weapons of mass distraction.”

March Compton, 54, a bank loan officer and Twin Peaks regular in San Antonio, says he often ends up spending more money there than he means to. “I’ve fallen for that routine,” he admits. He’s especially vulnerable at Halloween—“the costumes are very easy on the eyes.” Waitresses are paid minimum wage; DeWitt says it’s not unusual for them to make \$500 a night in tips, though former employees say the average is more like \$150.

Over lunch, DeWitt introduces me to Janie Donnelly, whose title is Twin Peaks girls brand manager. A former

Hooters calendar girl, Donnelly is 34, blond, and dressed conservatively in a black shirt and jeans. She’s tasked with making sure the waitresses realize their potential. Does she ever think the Twin Peaks servers are being exploited? “Absolutely not,” she says. “I think it’s a great place for the girls. They can work their way through college and move on.”

Many disagree. Diamond Dampf, who paid her way through Oklahoma State University working as a Twin Peaks waitress and corporate trainer, found the daily evaluations offensive. “The whole thing is degrading,” she says. Her customers, young and

Peaks waitresses should show more of themselves. “Hooters just wasn’t racy enough,” he says.

The first Twin Peaks did well, so DeWitt converted a few more Rockfish Grills. In 2008 the parent company of the Bennigan’s and Steak and Ale chains filed for bankruptcy. DeWitt bought as many of its outlets as he could and turned them into Twin Peaks.

Then in 2011, he got a voice mail from Coby Brooks: The former Hooters CEO wanted to be a Twin Peaks franchisee. DeWitt ended up signing a deal allowing Brooks and his partners, many of them former top Hooters executives, to open 35 Twin Peaks over the next decade. Hooters responded by suing Brooks’s company, accusing it of stealing trade secrets. (Brooks denied the charges; the lawsuit was eventually settled.)

DeWitt, who expects to open 21 more restaurants this year, puts all of his franchisees through a training process at the Addison Twin Peaks. They learn about the chain’s signature chicken wings and burgers and how to serve beer at

old, hit on her constantly. “Unfortunately, the girls are a dime a dozen, and that’s how they’re treated,” says Dampf, now 22 and working as a recruiter at a trucking firm. But she acknowledges the money was great.

Back in Addison, Freeman is clearing our food. She says she used to work at a Chuy’s Mexican Food, serving a lot of kids who barely tipped at all.

“Are you making more here?” DeWitt asks.

“Yeah,” Freeman says hesitantly.

“Why are my servers reluctant to talk about making money?” DeWitt carps. “It’s like they’re Democrats or something.”

“I’m not embarrassed,” Freeman says, hurt. “I’m making quite a bit of money right now. I’m enjoying it.”

DeWitt finishes his man-size beer and asks for the check. He wants to go across the street to visit Hooters. “We’ll be missing you, Courtney,” he says.

“Yeah, well, I hope so,” Freeman says as we leave. **B**