

Boudin SF opens to hungry crowd

By *The Record*

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STOCKTON - The rush for Gold Rush-era bread is on.

Boudin SF, a 159-year-old sourdough-baking enterprise, has brought its seventh restaurant in the nation to Stockton. Boudin SF opened Monday at Stonecreek Village on Pacific Avenue.

When the doors opened at 9 a.m., the first customers were Stockton sisters Tammy Gerolaga and April Hill. They had been waiting in line for 24 hours.

Gerolaga and Hill led a parade of 100 people who had waited all night as part of a Boudin grand-opening promotion. The first 100 customers will receive a free loaf of sourdough bread every day for a year.

Actually, Gerolaga and Hill were Nos. 2 and 3 in line. First place was automatically reserved for the Greater Stockton Emergency Food Bank.

"We wanted to start with respect for the community," said Kelvin Kimball, general manager of the new Stockton restaurant, "not as a chain or corporation."

While Boudin Bakery has been around since the mid-19th century, full-service restaurants such as Stockton's are relatively new. It will offer breakfast, lunch and dinner seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. The menu is built around the company's signature bread, which, Kimball said, "represents the best of San Francisco - the Golden Gate, sourdough and fog."

The lure of free bread was strong enough, he said, that Stockton's line formed faster and earlier than Sacramento's restaurant, which opened a year ago.

For Gerolaga and Hill, the sourdough bread definitely was the draw. "And I won't have to drive to San Francisco any more. I can save some gas," said Hill, who arrived at Boudin's front door at 8:30 a.m. Sunday. Her sister showed up soon after. Both are special-education assistants for the Stockton Unified School District, and both said the bread will come in handy for class projects and helping to feed their large families.

"For some of our students, learning to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich is a big accomplishment," Hill said.

The sisters spent part of their overnight time doing homework. Both also are students at San Joaquin Delta College. Company organizers believe Stockton will break customer records for Boudin SF.

"The location is great. The line formed early, the community response has been terrific, and we had 500 applicants for jobs," Kimball said. "We think we've hired the 44 best."