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Debbie Leonard, Colt Leonard, Craig Leonard and Vice Mayor Leroy Bennett celebrate the opening of the Rally's restaurant on North Main Street.

New food spot hits Main Street

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Craig and Debbie Leonard have traveled the world with jobs in different fast food restaurants, but they have now landed in Hampton Roads with this week's opening of Rally's.

The Leonards have proven to be shrewd at knowing their market. The eatery already has proven popular, with traffic backing up onto North Main Street during lunchtime and after work.

“Initially, we were drawn to Suffolk because of the growth in terms of houses and everyone moving to the area,” Craig Leonard said. “As we got into the project, we saw that the city itself is pro-growth, and they are very helpful. If I had to choose between Suffolk and other cities, just from the help from the city, I’d pick Suffolk hands down.”

The Leonards have a plethora of experience with upper management in fast food organizations. Craig spent time rising through the ranks at McDonald’s and spent 30 years with the company. He ended up as chief operating officer in Japan.

“They’ve been high up in the food chain, but they are the most down-to-earth people. They are business owners making a decent amount of money, but you wouldn’t know that by looking at them,” said Director of Franchise Development Robert Bhagwandat.

When they relocated to Hampton Roads, they wanted to start a family business with their Rally’s franchise.

“We moved to Virginia Beach, and our motivation was to create a family business. I have two sons with one on the West Coast and one in Georgia, and I wondered how I would get them to live closer to us,” Craig Leonard said. “It was the perfect storm of everything coming together, and now both of my sons have bought homes in Hampton Roads.”

The family is ready to bring their love and dedication to Suffolk, and they are eager to learn about the city.

“I think we have a lot of learning to do, but initially we are hiring 60 people so that we can bring 60 great jobs to the town,” Craig Leonard said. “All of the management team is from the immediate area, and we have started to talk to the new employees to learn about the schools and the town.”

The duo is looking for opportunities to get involved in the city, and they are excited to build relationships within the school division to reach out.

“My wife was a teacher, and my two daughters-in-law who help us out are very engaged in the community,” Craig Leonard said. “We are trying to figure out what we can do in Suffolk.”

While they want to get involved in the community, they want to make sure to make a difference within their own store.

“My wife and I have experienced in our careers a handful of good people that gave us opportunities to grow in our careers,” Craig said. “Now it’s the stage for us where our mission is to create opportunities for our employees so they can have the same chances we had.”