

# Hartz Chicken picks Malaysia as its Asian base

By JACK WONG in Kuching

US-BASED fast food restaurant chain Hartz Chicken Buffet has picked Malaysia as its Asian operations base with its first overseas restaurant set up in Kuching, Sarawak.

Hartz Chicken, Inc president and chief executive officer George N. Samaras said Malaysia was chosen because of its potential to become one of the key countries in Asia in the next 15 to 25 years.

"We feel that Malaysia is the best market to introduce Hartz Chicken Buffet, and from here we will expand rapidly into other Asian countries," he told *Star Business* at Hartz Chicken Buffet restaurant in Sarawak Plaza on Saturday.

Miri-based Hartz Chicken (M) Sdn Bhd, which has been award-

ed the franchise for Malaysia and Brunei, has invested over RM1 million to operate the 160-seater restaurant.

There are presently 44 Hartz Chicken Buffet restaurants in the United States, with the first opened in 1972. They serve over 100 recipes, including fried and roasted chicken and fish burgers, and hot and cold salad bars.

Samaras, a retired US marine officer, said his company had signed a letter of intent with a Hartz Chicken operator in Thailand and was expected to sign similar agreements in Indonesia and Hong Kong in 30 days.

"We are negotiating with Singapore and are looking at the Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea and China.

"In the next 12 months, we will begin our operations in Thai-

land, Indonesia, Brunei and possibly Hong Kong and opening a total of 10 to 12 restaurants in these countries," he added.

Samaras, who was a combat marine in Vietnam and had lived in Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and Singapore for seven years, said the company planned to set up its office in Kuala Lumpur in the next one or two years to better serve the Asian markets, such as providing training support for restaurant staff.

Asked how Hartz Chicken compares with other big names in fast food, Samaras said: "We are unique in our buffet concept and we serve all they serve as well as a lot our competitors do not serve.

"We not only serve fast food but serve food fast."

Hartz Chicken (M) Sdn Bhd director/general manager Mar-

garet Sie said the company expected to open restaurants in Sibu, Miri and Petaling Jaya within one year.

"We are also looking for a location in Kuala Lumpur.

"We are about to sign an agreement and to start an outlet in Brunei," she added.

Sie said several enquiries had been received for sub-franchising.

The company, she said, had planned for a training centre in Kuala Lumpur to service restaurants in the peninsula while the Kuching restaurant would become the training centre for Sarawak.

"We are operating on a different concept, giving greater value meals. The response to our Kuching restaurant has been tremendous," she said.