

MAY 18, 2009



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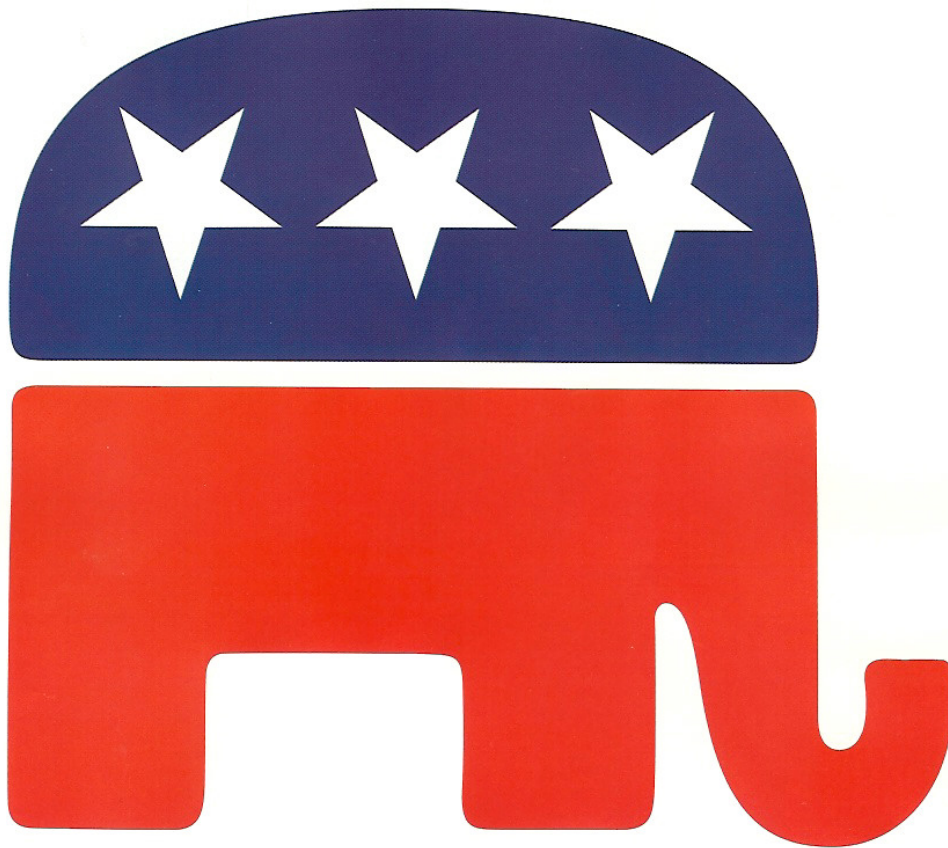
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NIGHTLIFE

Rocking Out at Denny's? To draw a younger crowd, the chain is amping up its late-night vibe. Drunks welcome

BY SEAN GREGORY/DANBURY

IT'S A SATURDAY NIGHT IN April, and Me Talk Pretty is rocking the house. Not a very large house, mind you. The kind of dank, beer-stained shoe box frequented by up-and-comers. But the sound is sharp, and the vocalist, Julia Preotu, can sing. Me Talk Pretty has potential.

Between songs, however, Preotu offers a very odd invitation. "Come party with us at Denny's later on," she tells the small, somewhat liquored-up crowd in Dan-

bury, Conn. Say what? These hip 20-somethings are taking the after-party to Denny's? Isn't that the place where old people powwow over coffee? Later, the lead singer of another band, called Man on Earth, tries to whip the fans into more of a frenzy. "Celebrate over at Denny's with Me Talk Pretty," he yells. "We'll tear the s__ out of the place!"

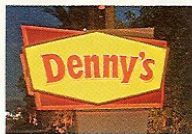
Guard your Grand Slam breakfasts, people. The recession has hit casual-dining chains like Denny's, Chili's and the Cheesecake Factory particularly hard, as consum-



Grand Slam jam session The alt-rock band Me Talk Pretty at a Denny's in Connecticut; in a bid for buzz, the chain is sponsoring aspiring musicians

DEANIS KLEMAN FOR TIME

ers have traded down to less expensive fare at McDonald's. To draw more customers, Denny's is sponsoring shindigs like this one, building on its reputation as an after-party haven for young, hungry drunks (and, the company is quick to point out, sober people too). From 10 p.m. to 5 a.m., the 56-year-old chain has started playing alternative-rock music in its restaurants. It has sponsored more than 30 emerging bands, like Me Talk



Pretty, which get free meals on the road as long as they occasionally head to Denny's for a postshow jam session. The chain has also added cheap items to its late-night menu (Pancake Puppies, Kickin' Flavor Wraps), designed to be shared by groups of amped-up rabble rousers.

Through its Allnighter program, Denny's is trying to give members of the late-night crowd a social experience they can't get at fast-food drive-throughs,

which are now staying open later and eating into the chain's graveyard-shift revenues. Denny's has instructed its servers to chat up tipsy customers. "We want them to say, 'Looks like you guys were having some fun tonight—who wants coffee now?'" says Michael Polydoroff, director of sales promotion and licensing at Denny's.

In Danbury, Joe Kyek, a college student who at 1 a.m. on a Sunday seemed to fit the chain's target demographic, says he has started going to Denny's more often and sees



Catch the After-Party

To see a video of Me Talk Pretty playing at Denny's, go to time.com/dennys

it in a new light. "Every time someone mentioned Denny's, I'd picture that couple over there," he says, nodding toward a middle-aged husband and wife sitting in a booth. "Now it's kind of New Age, up with the trends."

As for tearing the place apart, well, the after-party was fairly well behaved. In fact, Me Talk Pretty sang an acoustic number that even the middle-aged couple enjoyed. "The girl has a fabulous voice," said Ron Barriault, 54. "It's dinner and a show." At the last place you'd expect it. Rock on. ■