

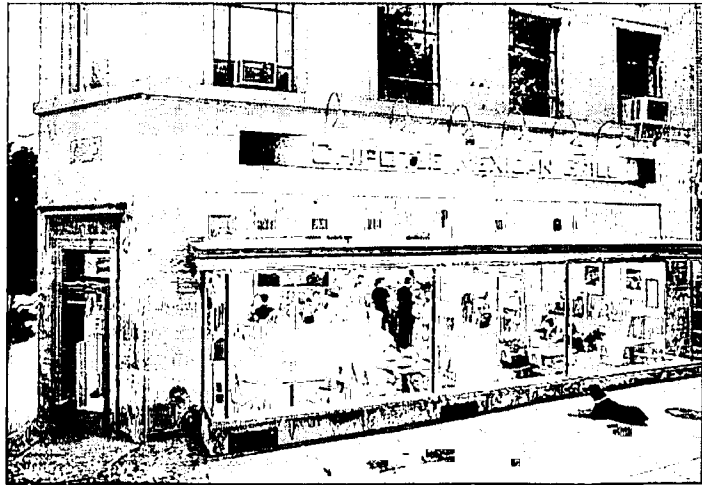
Western burrito chain looking east to Island

BY LAUREN WEBER
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Chipotle Mexican Grill, the fast-growing chain of burrito shops, is looking for a toehold on Long Island.

That would bring a new player to the Island in the expanding "fast-casual" category, a term used to describe restaurants that offer the speed and convenience of a fast-food chain, but with better ambience and higher-quality ingredients. Chipotle was a pioneer in the category, along with sandwich chains Panera Bread and Cosi.

Once it arrives — a company executive expects the first loca-



Chipotle restaurant in Woodley Park in Washington, D.C.

tions to open in 2006 — Chipotle will compete with the likes of Panera and Cosi, along with direct Mexican-food rivals such as Baja Fresh and Moe's Southwest Grill.

The Denver, Colo.-based company, which is owned by McDonald's, has hired Breslin Realty as its exclusive broker and is considering at least six sites on Long Island, including locations in Hicksville, Syosset, Farmingdale, East Meadow, Commack and Rockville Centre. In Farmingdale, Chipotle would likely locate in the Breslin development on Route 110, in a strip center in front of the planned Wal-Mart.

"We're looking in many mar-

kets where there's both a good lunch business — meaning a lot of working people in the area — as well as good residential," said Marc Frankel, Chipotle's northeast real estate manager.

The aggressive site search on Long Island is part of a planned expansion all over the metropolitan area, one that will be fueled by cash from an initial public offering next year.

McDonald's, which began investing in Chipotle in 1999 when it saw how rapidly the new concept was growing, said on Tuesday that it will sell a minority stake in the chain through the IPO. Chipotle has about 400 locations.