The new Tabasco:  
'Ve have a great story to tell' 

MEGAN WYATT  
MWYATT@THEADVERTISER.COM  

Linda Clause, manager of the Tabasco Pepper Sauce visitor center, remembers fondly more than 25 years back when she served as a tour guide for the iconic hot sauce company. 

She said she loved to watch locals and tourists experience the overwhelming spice and vinegar in the rooms where barrels of mash aged for three years on Avery Island in Iberia Parish.

"They'd smell it. They'd choke. They'd cry," Clause says. "People missed it when we stopped it." 

Tabasco stopped offering all-access tours of its hot sauce facility in the early 1980s because the once intimate company was growing rapidly and because of the 1982 Tylenol scare, in which several people died as a result of poison laced in the painkillers. Although police ruled out contamination in the facility during the investigation, many companies took security measures to ensure their products would not become contaminated by visitors. 

Although Tabasco management allowed visitors to see how the pepper sauce was packaged and advertised, the tour became much less interactive. 

Until now, that is. "We're going to be able to smell it and choke on it and cry from it again," Clause says. "You won't be as close as before, but it'll be great to expand the tours."

Seeing and smelling the aging pepper mash will be just one component of Tabasco's expanded seed-to-table tour, which will be offered in full later this year.

Tabasco executives have kept quiet about the construction taking place at Avery Island, which includes a new restaurant and museum and the expansion of the visitors' center. 

The restaurant, named 1868 for the founding year of Tabasco, will open to the public at 9 a.m. Monday.

The expanded tours — which will include access to different pepper growing stages, the aging barrels of mash, the new restaurant and a museum that will be filled with...
historical Tabasco and McIlhenny family artifacts — won’t be offered for two or three months more.

“We did that on purpose because we want to be in the restaurant business for a couple of months before we run the full operation,” says Cecil Hymel, vice president of administration for Tabasco.

At first, the restaurant will serve Cajun entrees that use different varieties of Tabasco sauce, but the restaurant’s menu will expand to include international options to encourage international tourists to use Tabasco in everyday meals back home.

Currently, the menu includes options such as pepper jelly boudin, pepper barrel crawfish etouffee and raspberry chipotle ice cream. Prices range from $7-12 per entree.

“For the locals who haven’t been to Avery Island in a long time, they’ll see that it’s a hidden treasure they’ve forgotten about,” says Angie Schaubert, senior manager of brand sales for Tabasco.

“Our visitors these days don’t just want to see the facility. They want to use their senses. They want to see, touch, smell, taste, feel everything.”

Tabasco management won’t yet reveal anything that will be on display in the new museum — “How do I know the LA Times won’t call and want to talk about this next week if I tell you?” Hymel asks — but they promise that it alone will be worth the visit.

“There will be things related to the brand’s iconic status and to the family’s role in American history,” Hymel says.

“It’s not just all about Tabasco. If you come and take the tour, you’ll understand what I mean. We think we have a great story to tell.”

Top, visitor center manager Linda Clause in the McIlhenny Company’s new restaurant, 1868, on Avery Island. Of the new tour, Clause said visitors will “to be able to smell (the pepper mash) and choke on it and cry from it again.” Or, they might choose to enjoy a Raspberry Azalea, which is raspberry chipotle Tabasco sauce ice cream drizzled with the sauce.