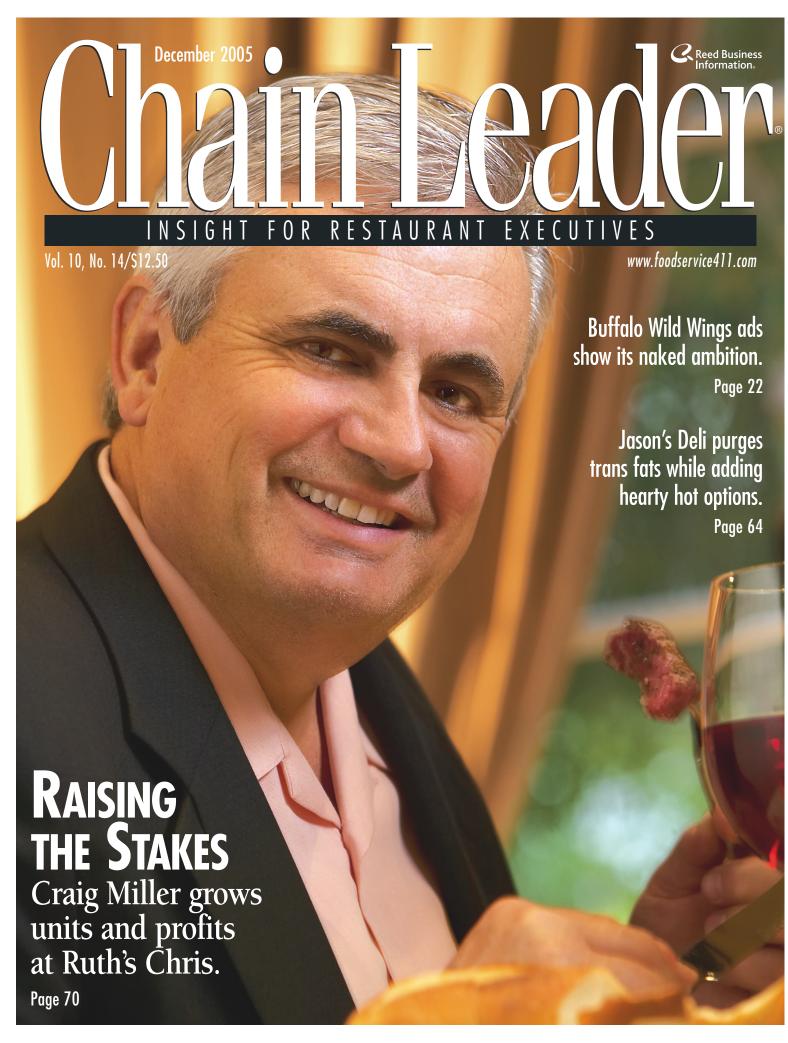




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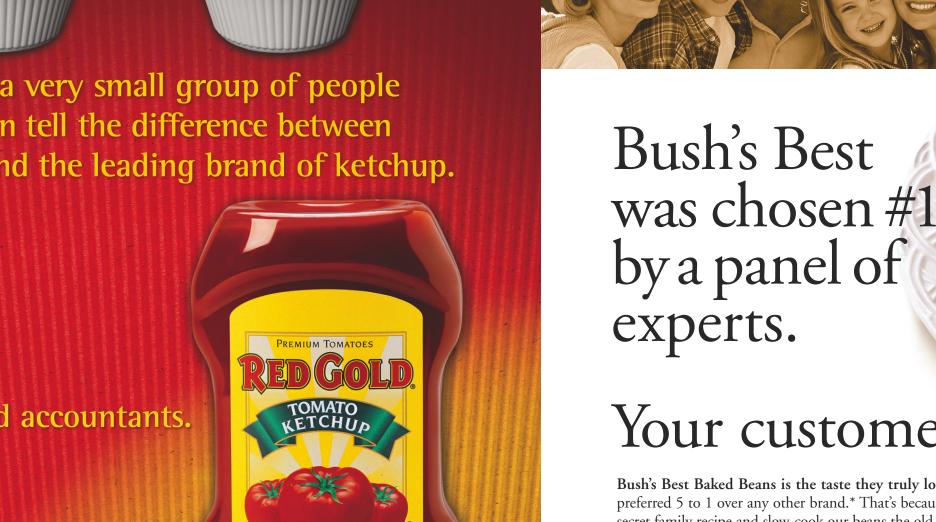


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MARKET FORCES

Of course, the research won't

buy it, but fast-food customers

According to Consumer

tell you if they will actually

say there aren't enough

healthful items at quick-

service restaurants.

FOOD SAFETY

An Ounce of **Prevention**

FC has taken a proactive position to counter possible customer concerns about avian flu. The Louisville, Ky.based division of Yum Brands is preparing TV commercials to reassure consumers that its chicken is safe.

Yum Brands Senior Vice President of Public Affairs Jonathan Blum told investors, "We'll keep them on the shelf and hope not to use them."

KFC's sales growth has slowed in China to 8 percent from 24 percent in 2004. Yum blames a failed fried-chicken product promotion. But some customers in China are avoiding chicken altogether.

According to the World Health Organization, it is safe to eat poultry even if there is a bird-flu outbreak, as long as it is

cooked to 150 degrees or more. But NPD Group's Food Safety Monitor found that about 40 percent of respondents are aware of and concerned about bird flu.

"We're keeping our fingers on the pulse of what happens day in and day out around the world," Blum said. "And we are taking action in terms of preparing for this in the event it becomes an eventuality in any market."

Beef Could Be

aving banned U.S. beef imports for the past two years, the Japanese government may now be easing its restrictions. It has announced that U.S. beef poses a low risk of causing harm to consumers.

While not setting a timeline for when imports could resume, the committee

was the biggest buyer of U.S. beef, with \$1.5 billion in purchases in 2003, according to the U.S. Meat Export Federation.

Back in Business

addressing the issue said American beef would need to be from cattle 20 months or younger with certain parts like brains and spinal-cord tissue

removed. Before the ban, Japan

Attitudes Toward Health and items available. More than better selection. said there isn't enough information.

would visit one of their regu-Restaurants, a study by San Clemente, Calif.-based lar fast-food chains more often if they had more health-

research firm Sandelman & Associates, 59 percent of QSR customers think there should be more nutritious

OSR Customers Ask for Healthful Fare

Nutrition and Fast-Food

More than half said fastfood restaurants don't provide enough nutritional information. And almost three quarters of 16- to 24-year-olds

a third of QSR users said they

ful items. And 68 percent

would visit a chain they don't

typically go to if it offered a

About a third of respondents said they are very concerned about the nutritional content of fast food, and a third are worried about the quantity they receive.

Take Note

In Chain Leader's October issue, the headquarters of Denny's design company, Vision 3 Architects, was incorrect. Vision 3 is based in Providence, R.I. We regret the error.



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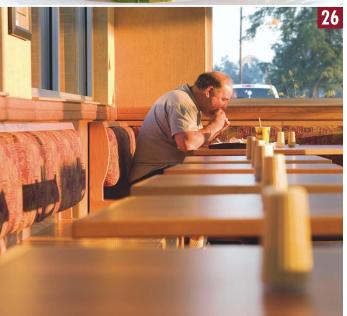
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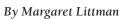
Chain Leader

STORYBOARD

22 Naked Ambition

To attract more of its 18- to 49-year-old demographic and women to its restaurants, Minneapolis-based Buffalo Wild Wings developed Naked Tenders, a more healthful alternative to its fried and battered wings. The chain launched an advertising

campaign for the non-breaded chicken tenders in September, playing up the irreverent nature of the product name that is consistent with the 23-year-old concept's vibe. In the 30-second TV commercial, the chicken tenders are pixilated, so as to obscure their "naked" bodies.





RESTAURATOUR

26 Lightening Up

Charlotte, N.C.-based Bojangles' has modernized its design without making it unrecognizable. The bright colors of its Mardi Gras design and QSR-style finishes has given way to quieter earth tones, a more muted shaded of its signature orange, and upscale finishes such as wood and Italian-looking tile. Since remodeling 18 stores, check averages and unit volumes are up.

By Lisa Bertagnoli



COVER STORY

70 Raising the Stakes

President and CEO Craig S. Miller has grown units, volumes and profits at Ruth's Chris Steak House since taking the helm in 2004. He has leveraged the bottom line by selectively marketing the chain's image, boosting margins and increasing sales. Analysts remain bullish on Ruth's Chris' long-term prospects despite some setbacks the chain encountered in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma. Ruth's Chris posted double-digit same-store-sales gains in company stores for seven consecutive quarters—a record unmatched by other luxury steakhouse chains.

By David Farkas

TOQUE OF THE TOWN

64 Give and Take

Director of Product Development Lisa Tillman has purged trans fats from Jason's Deli while adding hot options such as pastas, paninis and wraps to drive dinner business. She is also shaping more classic "big belly" sandwiches—those stuffed with 6 ounces or more of meat. And she is planning entree salads and a salad-bar revamp to include more organic produce and soups. The company made these changes without passing costs on to customers, underscoring Jason's belief that if you build it better, crowds will come. Same-store sales for July, August and September were up 8 percent to 10 percent.

By Monica Rogers

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Check out www.foodservice411.com/clmag for daily news, Web-only content and archive stories from the pages of Chain Leader.

Employment Opportunity

t People Report's Best Practices Conference last month in Dallas, founder and CEO Joni Doolin looked back at how human resources has changed over the last 10 years. She pointed out that one of the first successful efforts to really make the link between employee satisfaction and guest satisfaction was *The Service Profit Chain*, by W. Earl Sasser, Leonard A. Schlesinger and James L. Heskett, published in 1997.



Companies that recognize people are an asset, not an expense, will keep their best workers.

MARY BOLTZ CHAPMAN, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

(630) 288-8250 mchapman@reedbusiness.com But Doolin also looked ahead at demographics that show a shrinking teenage work force, the need to build greater trust with employees and the growing expectation that companies work toward a cause more important than profits.

For those who don't know, People Report benchmarks and analyzes restaurant-industry people practices for its consor-

tium of member companies and for the industry at large. Research findings from People Report's Survey of Unit Level Employment Practices primarily determine which companies *Chain Leader* features in our special "Best Places To Work" issue each year.

Learn from the Best

At the conference, some may have felt Doolin was preaching to the choir. Many companies in the room already have sophisticated, long-term staff development and measurements in place. But Doolin challenged even those organizations to innovate. And interestingly, those companies are willing, even driven, to share how they recruit and retain their best employees to help others do the same.

I spoke to two human-resources executives who unwittingly demonstrated the range of commitment to people practices in the industry. In one conversation, I learned of a large restaurant company that is trying to get around regulations that restrict it from

offering benefits to the employees of its franchisees. In another, I was surprised to hear that the franchisees of a large QSR chain don't get support or guidance on HR issues from the franchisor. I find it hard to believe that there are still chains that don't consider servers an important part of their brand.

Where does your company fit along that spectrum?

Action and Talk

If you feel that the people in your organization are an asset to be managed well, it's a good start, as far as Doolin and whoever runs HR in your company are concerned. Admitting you have a problem is the first step. Taking action is the hard part.

Invite your human-resources executives to the table. They should be an equal partner with operations and finance. They need to help determine your company's goals rather than just execute them. They already know all about the link between people and profits, and I'll bet they've even tried to tell you about it.

The companies featured at the conference and those that regularly appear on "best places to work" and "most admired" lists usually have operations, finance and human-resources executives who communicate and work toward the same goals.

A note to HR: Sometimes it's not that your presidents and CEOs don't want to hear you, it's that you're not talking their language. Learn what's important to them: same-store sales, return on investment, cost savings, through-put time. Not only will you make your case in terms they understand, but it will demonstrate that you are engaged in the business. Chain leaders love that.

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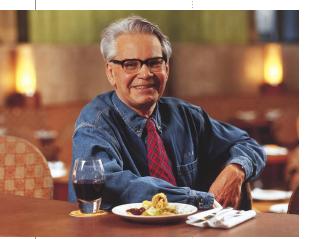
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Opinions and Answers

e's said it before and he'll say it again. The outspoken Bob Merritt told a record crowd of 1,400 at the annual Restaurant, Finance and Development Conference in Las Vegas last month that he was fed up with constant changes in financial rules and with the organizations that govern financial reporting. I respect him for standing up for his strong views and agree that the Securities and Exchange Commission must devise a consistent and fair reporting system.



The audience seemed to warm up to Merritt as well, and I got the feeling that they liked what he said.

Changing the Rules

Changes in financial accounting incited a frenzy among some 150 restaurants and retailers who had to suddenly adjust their reporting methods late last year and this year. The new rules prompted Merritt to leave

Outback Steakhouse Inc. in May after 16 years as CFO.

Considered one of the best restaurant CFOs of the last 20 years, Merritt came to Outback with a wealth of experience. He had worked as a Price Waterhouse auditor in the late 1970s and subsequently was CFO of Vie de France from 1981 to 1985, CFO of the now defunct JB's in the late 1980s and finally CFO of Outback in 1990. "All that time I was perfectly happy until the rules made it so difficult for CFOs," he asserted.

Merritt retired from Outback, declaring that he had faced "the good, the bad and the ugly," but he noted that it had been good until the past year when he admittedly "made a noisy exit."

What drove him crazy was the lack of process in the rules as well as the constant frenzy and changes, Merritt observed. "They generated new rules and restated everything over and over. It was a virtual madhouse, and

none of it really helped financial reporting."

Merritt remains proud of what he accomplished in his 16 years at Outback and praises President Bill Allen and other company leaders. In fact, after his resignation he continued to work with Outback as a consultant.

And he said he is optimistic about recently appointed SEC Chairman Chris Cox, who seems to have the potential to change things for the better.

Working the System

Now that he is free to say what he wants, Merritt offered some key ideas to the conference attendees: "Be a businessperson first and then a financial person if you really want the best results." And from his many years in business, he emphasized that "if you are a private company, stay that way rather than having to comply with all the different rules."

Yet most of all, he warned operators not to try to fool Wall Street. If you had a bad quarter, be honest about what happened. "If we do nothing else," Merritt said, "honest integrity will take us a long way."

Now that 53-year-old Merritt has left Outback, he can take it easy if he wants. But he recently accepted a director position on the board of Deerfield Ill.-based Cosi for a three-year term. He said he has respect for Cosi and its two top executives, President and CEO Kevin Armstrong and Chairman William Forrest.

So Merritt will continue to have to work the system as rules continue to change. And he will likely continue to tell us what he thinks about it.

Bob Merritt
gives not only
his views
but guidance
on navigating
accounting rules.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN, EDITOR-AT-LARGE

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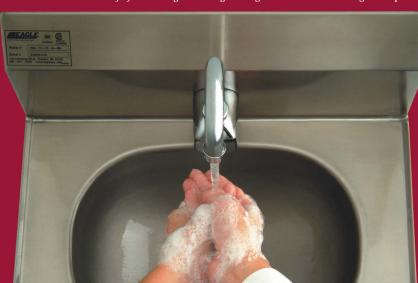
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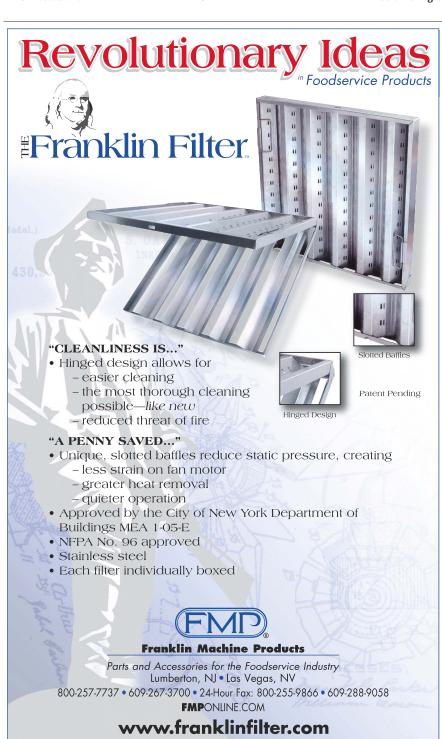
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Hot Pepper

Why investors should look forward to Chipotle's IPO.

BY DAVID FARKAS

hares of Chipotle Mexican Grill may soon be outselling the chain's fat burritos if next year's IPO takes off as some analysts expect. Prudential Equity Group's Larry Miller, for example, predicts a market cap of \$666.7 million should parent McDonald's sell just 15 percent of the company.

Chain Leader recently asked Miller, an Institutional Investor Best Upand-Comer in 2004, to explain his enthusiasm.

Why does it make sense for McDonald's to spin out Chipotle at this time?

The timing may not be the best, as restaurant stocks have been under

pressure due to concerns about weaker consumer demand from high energy costs. But we believe McDonald's is less interested in the "right" timing for this IPO since the motivation is about a greater focus on its core hamburger business.

How have investors reacted to the planned IPO?

Chipotle is a small part of McDon-

ald's and would appeal to a different type of investor, growth rather than value. Still, we believe most view it as a positive.

You've called Chipotle "one of the best restaurant concepts in existence." Financially speaking, what's your evidence?

The S-1 filing showed growth in comp-store sales during a period of rapid expansion, which is impressive, as there's often high levels of cannibalization when brands build out markets to get scale. The S-1 also showed that Chipotle has segment-leading average unit volumes of \$1.38 million and strong

unit economics.

If the Chipotle IPO turns out to be successful, will investors reward McDonald's with a higher valuation?

Probably not. Chipotle is a very small component of McDonald's total market capitalization, which we believe is another reason the company's spinning it out.

Chipotle's S-1 filing says the chain used McDonald's real-estate personnel to acquire sites in 2004 but did not use them in 2005. Is Chipotle capable of managing its own rapid growth?

My sense is that McDonald's has allowed Chipotle to run more independently than it had been to better prepare it for becoming an independent public company.

Chipotle has raised prices to cover the cost of expensive ingredients like Niman Ranch pork and naturally raised chicken. Granted "food with integrity" is part of Chipotle's appeal, but could high prices make the concept less competitive?

All restaurant companies have been faced with rising food costs, and most have raised prices to offset some inflation. In addition, consumers understand that food costs are going up. They only have to go to the supermarket to see this.

Chipotle's IPO. Tim Horton's proposed IPO. Are there parallels in terms of what the burger giants are attempting to accomplish?

The motivation is quite different here. McDonald's wants to spin Chipotle because it's not meaningful in the context of their business. Wendy's is spinning Tim Horton's because it was meaningful and the market wasn't recognizing the value of this brand. When it did announce the separation, they created significant shareholder value.





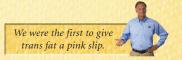
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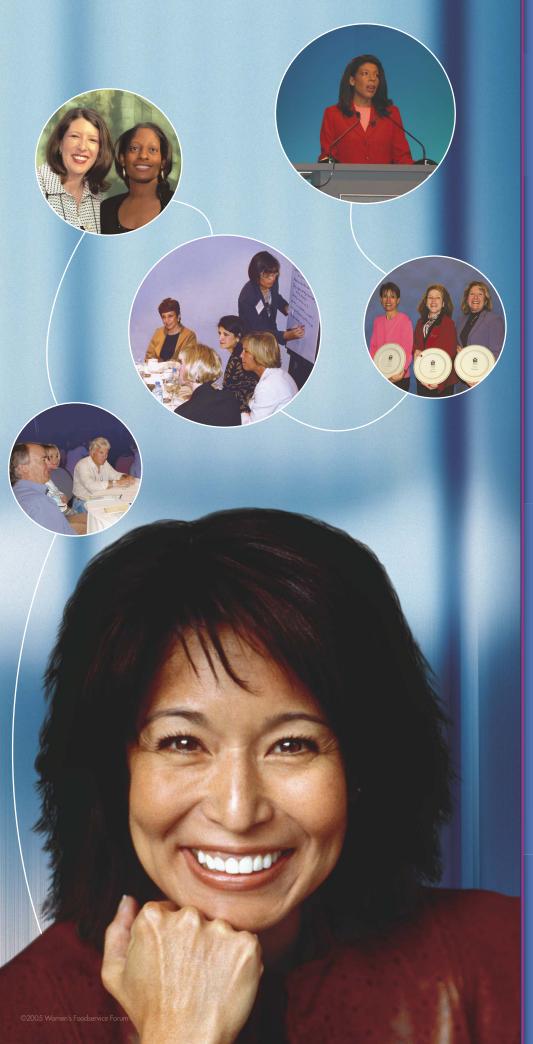
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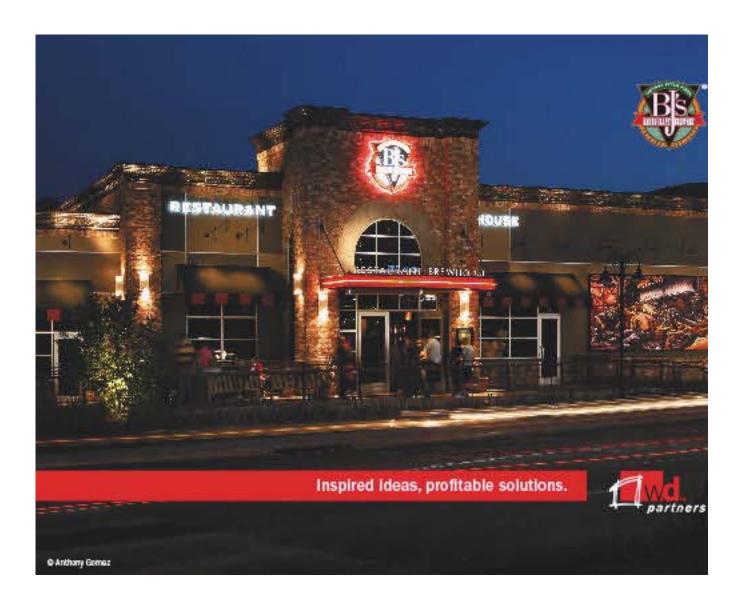
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Until now, multi-unit development has been a fragmented process: Brand strategists, designers, architects, engineers, and operations teams typically work walled off from one another, and often fail to produce a brand- and ROI-right prototype that can be rolled out. Time and money are wasted.

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Eddie V's brings high-end seafood to a casual, high-energy setting with Wildfish.



Applied Learning

BY MAYA NORRIS

uy Villavaso and Larry Foles are out to prove that upscale seafood doesn't have to be confined to formal, white-tablecloth restaurants. Using the knowledge they've gained as the founders and owners of Eddie V's Edgewater Grille, a three-unit, fine-dining seafood chain, the duo is taking their seafood know-how to casual dining with the November launch of Wildfish Seafood Grille in Newport, Calif.

"Wildfish is that same culinary niche [as Eddie V's] but presented in a different design presentation," says Villavaso, who also created Z'Tejas Southwestern Grill with Foles. "It's going to be high-end seafood delivery in a fun environment that people can enjoy in a casual way and come back frequently."

Same but Different

Targeting the upper end of casual dining with a check average of \$50, Wildfish will have a menu similar to Eddie V's sophisticated fare. Mainstay dishes will include Sauteed Gulf Snapper Meuniere, \$19.95, with lemon and brown-butter meuniere sauce; Chilean Sea Bass, Steamed Hong Kong Style, \$28.50, with light soy broth, sesame spinach and pickled ginger; and Sauteed Georges Bank Lemon Sole in Parmesan Crust, \$21.95, with plum tomatoes and lemon-garlic butter sauce.

But Wildfish's menu will differ from Eddie V's in a few ways. Executive Chef John Carver will experiment with wok cooking via dishes like Wok-Seared & Sliced Pacific Ahi Tuna, \$11.95, with soba noodle and shiitake stir-fry in light shoyu broth. Plate presentations will be more

casual. And the menu will include more appetizers that guests can share.

And unlike Eddie V's clubby, intimate fine-dining surroundings, Wildfish will feature a casual, contemporary decor with a mix of light cherry and blond woods, glass, steel and stained concrete. To create an interactive, people-watching environment, the 7,500-square-foot, 300-seat restaurant will have an open layout with an exposition kitchen, bar, oyster bar and patio. "It's not so high energy as to infringe on the dining experience," Villavaso says. "But there's a lot of visual participation in the level of activity."

School of Fish

Villavaso is confident that the dinner-only concept will ring up \$5 million in sales in its first 12 months, emphasizing that Wildfish's commitment and passion for the finest seafood will set it apart from the competition. With fish flown in daily from areas such as the North Atlantic, Pacific Coast and Gulf of Mexico, the menu will change weekly and include daily and seasonal specials. In addition, all chefs and general managers attend a three-day seminar at Boston-based Foley Fish, the chain's seafood processor, to learn how to source, ship, store and handle seafood.

In the meantime, the company plans to open another Wildfish in February 2006 in Scottsdale, Ariz., and a third in San Antonio by the end of 2006. It is looking for inline sites in lifestyle centers and freestanding locations in metropolitan areas with a dense population of 25- to 54-year-old professionals. The company expects to open two units a year in Arizona, Texas and Southern California for the next several years.



Although it does offer USDA, specially aged center-cut steaks, Wildfish specializes in high-end seafood dishes such as the Chilean Sea Bass, Steamed Hong Kong Style and Pacific Ahi Tuna "Filet Mignon."

SNAPSHOT

CONCEPT

Wildfish Seafood Grille

PARENT COMPANY

Eddie V's Restaurants Inc., Scottsdale, Ariz.

UNITS

1

2006 Systemwide Sales

\$10 million (company estimate)

AVERAGE Unit Volume

\$5 million (company estimate)

AVERAGE CHECK

\$50

EXPANSION PLANS

2 a year

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"Tastefully Done" Length: 30 seconds



1. Customer 1: Um, excuse me. Is this what we ordered? Waitress: Yeah, Naked Tenders.



2. Customer 1: But they're kind of blurry, aren't they? What are they, digitized or something?



3. Waitress: Actually, they're pixilated. They are Naked Tenders.
Customer 1: Ohhh.
Why don't you just use those black bars?



4. Waitress: Oh, no, those are just for concealing identity.

Riffing on its playfully named new product, Buffalo Wild Wings takes it all off on TV. Ambition

ings. Beer. Sports." This tagline is the operational trifecta for Buffalo Wild Wings, a simple distillation of everything for which the concept stands. What else could the chain possibly add to court more of the 18-to 49-year-old demographic? Nudity, of course.

The Minneapolis-based company spent months developing Naked Tenders, a more healthful alternative to its fried and battered wings doused with one of 12 signature sauces. After adding them to the menu in August, the \$511 million chain began airing television spots for the nonbreaded chicken tenders in September on both network and cable TV in major markets.

By Margaret Littman

The Naked Truth

While the chain has aired a dozen TV commercials in select markets over the last six

years, the Naked Tenders ad is the first with Atlanta-based WestWayne, Buffalo Wild Wings' agency since December 2004. WestWayne spent three months developing the TV spots, point-of-purchase materials and radio ads, which take a light-hearted approach to a product the chain hopes will attract more female customers to its stores, given the perceived health benefits.

While the product, ad agency and target demographic may be new, the name and marketing approach is consistent with the 23-year-old chain's vibe. All the ideas for the ad campaign were born out of the irreverent nature of the product name, which Buffalo Wild Wings had chosen before WestWayne became its agency, says Bobby Pearce, executive vice president and executive creative director at WestWayne.

In the 30-second TV spot, the chicken tenders are pixilated, so as to obscure their







6. Customer 2: Whoa!



7. Voice-Over: New Naked Tenders. Juicy, grilled strips of all-white chicken. Only at Buffalo Wild Wings.



8. Buffalo Wild Wings. Wings. Beer. Sports.

"naked" bodies. The in-store materials quip, "For heaven's sake, cover them up," and, "If they had legs, they'd go streaking." The radio spots feature a female waitress asking her male customers if they'd like to try the new Naked Tenders. Every time she says the word "naked," they giggle.

"That's what guys do when they hear the word 'naked,' whether they are 30 or 13," Pearce says.

Making a Scene

According to Pearce, capturing the in-store excitement was part of the secondary objectives for the TV commercials. "I think the setting plays a big part into it. It gives an idea of what we are about and that we do not take ourselves too seriously," says John Hinz, senior director of marketing at Buffalo Wild Wings.

In addition to Naked Tenders, Buffalo Wild Wings is adding tags to ads in some markets and in-store displays promoting 50-cent "boneless Thursdays." That promotion emphasizes value, an approach the chain uses instead of couponing or other types of discounting. Even if those point-of-purchase materials aren't in the same aesthetic vein as those for Naked Tenders or other promotions, Hinz says customers benefit from consistency of message.

"For us, what is the same is the attitude, campaign to campaign, while focusing on a specific product," he says. "The Buffalo Wild Wings experience permeates through all of those [ad materials], showing people having a good time."

Buffalo Wild Wings serves both quick-

casual and casual-dining meals, allowing customers to order at the bar, at the counter or for takeout. An estimated 17 percent of sales are from takeout orders, according to Standard & Poor's.

"Our thought was that we needed something that made sure people understand what the product is," Hinz says. "We do want to make new users aware of us, but the main message was to emphasize what is new here. That is what is exciting."

Wild and Crazy

As the name suggests, Buffalo Wild Wings is as wild as it wants to be. But behind the bravado is a serious mission. The publicly held company plans to eventually triple its current number of 354 units, an aggressive plan investment analysts such as those at Standard & Poor's question. In the near term, Buffalo Wild Wings plans to increase the size of the chain by 20 percent in 2006. The company has signed a franchise agreement for 36 restaurants in the New York City area.

Because franchisees play a significant role in the chain's expansion strategy, their buy-in to the marketing of the new Naked Tenders line was essential. The chain's national advisory board, which includes six franchisees, OK'd the campaign before it was rolled out. Franchisees, who pay 3 percent of sales into an ad fund, liked that the campaign was clear and consistent with previous marketing efforts, Hinz says.

And for Buffalo Wild Wings' core audience, getting naked just sounds like a real good time.

SNAPSHOT

CONCEPT

Buffalo Wild Wings

HEADQUARTERS

Minneapolis

UNITS

354

2004 Systemwide Sales

\$511.4 million

2005

Systemwide Sales

\$567.6 million*

AVERAGE CHECK

\$9.25*

AD BUDGET

\$12 million*

AD AGENCY

WestWayne, Atlanta

EXPANSION PLANS

20 company stores; 50 to 55 franchises in 2006

*Chain Leader estimate

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Bojangles' goes contemporary with natural finishes, muted colors and lots of light.





By Lisa Bertagnoli

eing known as "fun and festive" isn't necessarily a bad thing. But after nearly 30 years of such a reputation, Bojangles', the Charlotte, N.C.-based quick-service chicken chain, longed for a change.

So the concept previously known for its orange mansard roof and lively interiors performed what a popular women's magazine calls a "makeunder." The bright colors of Bojangles' previous Mardi Gras design and QSR-style finishes gave way to quieter earth tones, a more muted shade of its signature orange, and upscale finishes such as wood and Italian-looking tile. The chain added booths to its dining room

Outside, brick and stucco cladding and masonry towers give the restaurant a distinctive profile without making it unrecognizable.

and made the restrooms bigger, with touch-free fixtures.

That's exactly what Bojangles' executives had in mind. "We wanted to contemporize our building look but not eliminate the 25 to 28 years of heritage that we have," explains Victor Webber, vice president of real estate and development.

David Maisel, a former Bojangles' executive and now a franchisee of seven restaurants in South Carolina, including the East Aynor location featured in this story, concurs: "There was nothing wrong with the old look; it just wasn't contemporary looking."

Comfort Zone

Two years ago, customers spurred Bojangles' into redesign action, Director of Franchising Chris Bailey says. Focus groups and research indicated that patrons considered Bojangles' a destination restaurant, but at the same time noted that the interior didn't quite feel like a destination location.

"They said, 'We like a more comfortable restaurant'...someplace to conduct business, someplace to sit quietly with their families," Bailey says.

To pull the dining rooms into the comfort zone, Webber added more light to the space in the form of bigger windows and glass block behind formerly dark areas such as the self-service beverage station. Glass block was installed in the kitchens as well, to make the workplace more employee friendly.

Brick and stucco cladding and masonry towers give Bojangles' a distinctive profile without making it unrecognizable.

SNAPSHOT

CONCEPT

Bojangles' Famous Chicken & Biscuits

LOCATION

East Aynor, S.C.

OPENING DATE

June 29, 2005

AREA

3,000 square feet

SEATS

100

AVERAGE CHECK

\$8.50

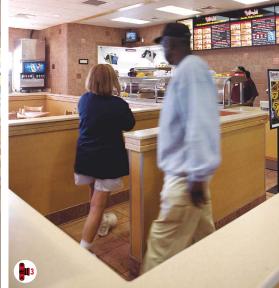
UNIT VOLUME

\$1.6 million

EXPANSION PLANS

30 to 40 new stores; 4 to 7 corporate remodels in 2006





(Clockwise from top I.)
Bojangles' chose the carpeting
and other finishes for their
durability.

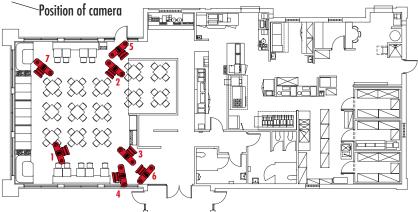
Formerly a metal railing, a wood-finished wall now marks the serpentine ordering line.

Wood seats and booth-back fabric are more contemporary than finishes in the chain's older Mardi Gras design.

Curves, such as the rounded glass of a display case, soften the interior.

This floor plan is designed to show the location of each key photograph. Shot numbers correspond with numbers in select photos.









The new design gives Bojangles' the ability to go national, executives say.

Webber replaced harsh finishes with softer ones. The metal railing at the serpentine ordering line is now a waist-high wooden wall. The Bojangles' logo is an oval instead of a rectangle. The glass display case for chicken has a curved front instead of a square one, and food containers are a soft black, not stark stainless steel.

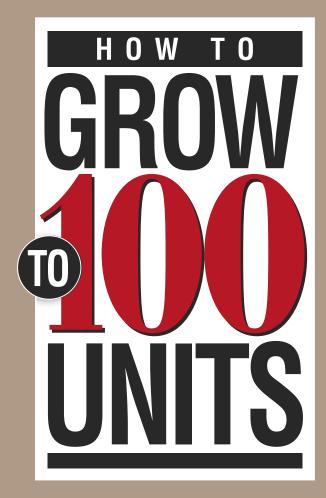
Trimming Here and There

The first new-look Bojangles' opened just outside of Charlotte, in Fort Mills, N.C., about a year ago. Since then the prototype has undergone a few changes in the name of both operations and value-engineering, according to Bailey. The designers changed the position of the beverage stations and tinkered with how to integrate booths, a new seating element for the concept, into the floor plan.

Cutting costs fell to Clay Elder, founder and CEO of Charlotte-based EDS Architecture, Interior Design and Project Management. Elder cut back on several masonry elements including dramatic, high exterior towers and specified an all-wood frame, rather than a stainless-steel one, to trim building costs. Inside, comparison shopping helped cut costs: For instance, Elder saved \$5,000 per store by choosing an American-made tile rather than Italian tile.

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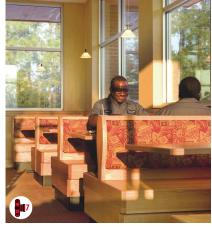
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Stucco and masonry towers add visual interest to Bojangles' new exterior.

(From I.) Bojangles' airy, contemporary look appeals to women and younger customers.

The prototype's booths are a first for Bojangles'.

New menu boards, currently in development, will feature more food photography.

According to Webber, value engineering remains a work in progress: "If we could get 10 percent [more] out, we'd be happy." The cost of the new building ranges from \$700,000 to \$900,000, Bailey says.

Credit Report

Bojangles' has remodeled 18 restaurants and is pleased with the results. Check averages are \$8.50 at the remodeled stores, compared to \$4.50 at older locations. The company attributes the boost partly to the fact that the

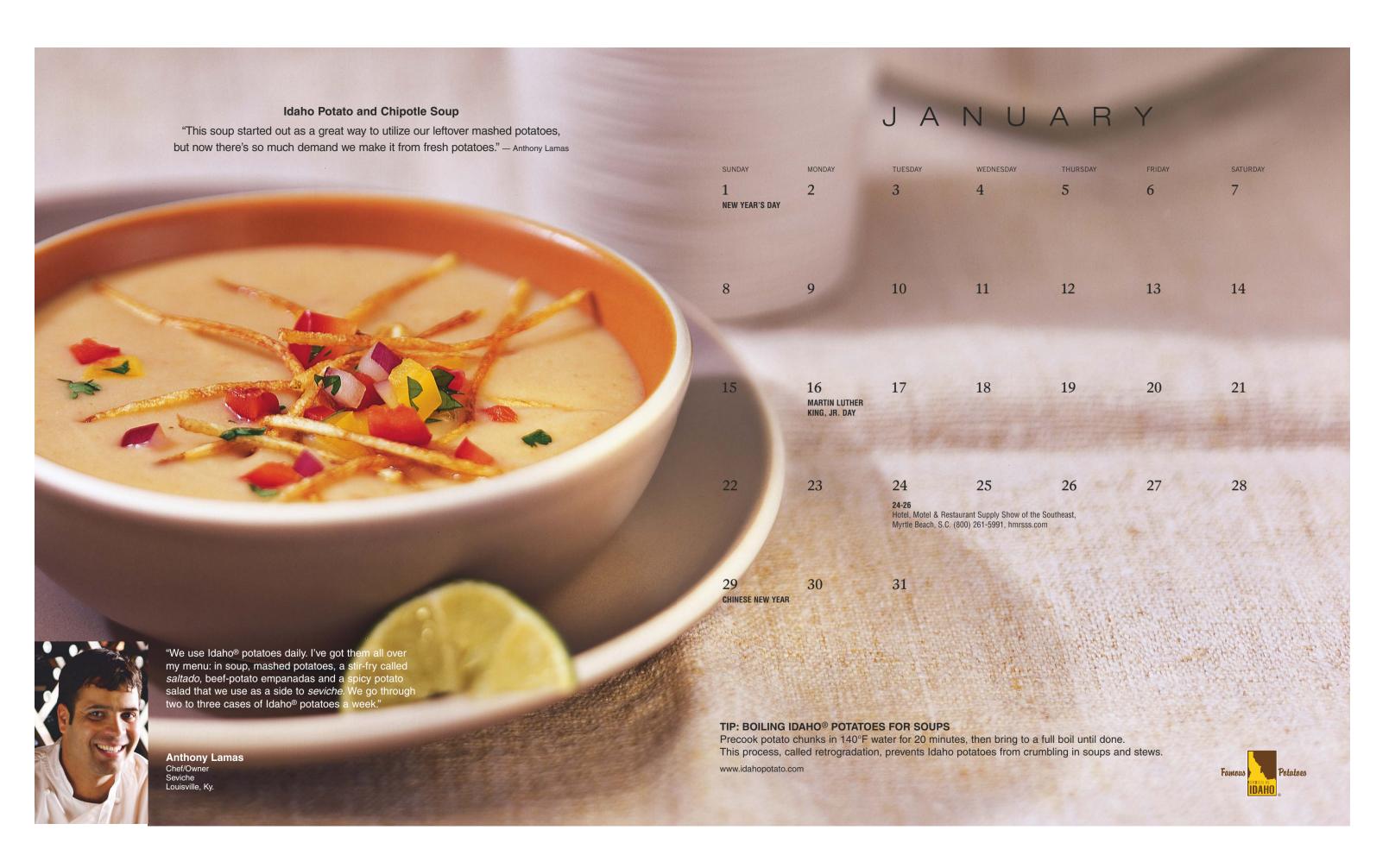
newer stores accept credit cards; credit-card purchases account for 35 percent of transactions. Unit volumes at franchised stores are growing by 2 percent annually; corporate stores are seeing double-digit growth, Bailey says. Bojangles' plans to remodel four to seven corporate stores a year.

For Maisel, the best news of all is that the new look is pulling in new customers. "We're getting a younger family audience that may not have tried Bojangles' before," he says. "Except for the pricing, you wouldn't think you're in a QSR.

"I built in a very small town," Maisel continues, "and it's the nicest restaurant in town."











MARCH

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY		
			1	2	3	4		
			ASH WEDNESDAY Feb. 26-March 1 IFMA Chain Operators Exchange (COEX 2006), Phoenix, (312) 540-4400, ifmaworld.com					
5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
5-7 International Restaurant & Foodservice Show of New York, New York, (888) 334-8705, international restaurant ny.com 7-8 Nightclub & Bar Be Convention & Trade (888) 966-2727, ni			v, Las Vegas,	9-12 Research Chefs Association Annual Culinology Conference & Trade Show, Houston, (404) 252-3663, culinology.org				
12	13	14	15	16	17	18		
9-12 13-15 Research Chefs Wisconsin Restaural Association Annual Culinology Conference & Trade Show, Houston, (404) 252- 3663, culinology.org		oo, Milwaukee, (800) 589- 14-16 International Pizza Expo,	3211, wirestaurant.org Las Vegas, (502) 736-9500	ST. PATRICK'S DAY 500, pizzaexpo.com				
19	20 FIRST DAY OF SPRING	21	22-24 Food Safety Summit, Las foodsafetysummit.com	23 Vegas, (800) 746-9646,	24	25		
26	27	28	(800) 289-4232, franchise March 29-April 1	30 ional Development Confere e-update.com ence, Seattle, (502) 581-97				

California Restaurant Industry Conference, Los Angeles, (310) 206-4271,

uclaextension.edu/restaurant

TIP: PRESERVING IDAHO® POTATO NUTRIENTS

To retain maximum nutrients and flavor, boil Idaho potatoes while unpeeled. After the potatoes cool for a few minutes, the skins will easily slip off.

www.idahopotato.com



Idaho Potato and Asparagus Pancakes

"Idaho® potatoes hold the shape of these pancakes, and the texture is wonderful: crispy on the outside, very moist on the inside and smooth as butter." — Emile Castillo



APRIL

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	March 29-April 1 IACP International Conference, Seattle, (502) 581-9786, iacp.com		
2 DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME BEGINS	3	4	5	6	7	8		
2-5 Women's Foodservice Forum Annual Leadership Development Conference, Dallas, (866) 368-8008, www.womensfoodserviceforum.com								
9 9-11 New England Foodservic (207) 842-5500, nefsex	10 ee & Lodging Exposition & co.com	11 Conference, Boston,	PASSOVER BEGINS AT SUNDOWN	13	14 GOOD FRIDAY	15		
16 EASTER SUNDAY	17	18	19	20	21	22		

"Idaho® potatoes are No. 1 when it comes to making french fries and also baked potatoes."

Emile Castillo
Executive Chef
Le Parker Meridien
New York

30

TIP: TESTING IDAHO® POTATOES

To test doneness of Idaho potatoes while boiling, pierce a potato with a sharp knife and lift it up in the water. When the potato drops off the knife tip back to the bottom of the pot, it is done.

www.idahopotato.com



29

28

"Baker's-Style" Idaho Potatoes with Morels and Sweet Onions

"Idaho® potatoes have the perfect starchiness for dishes like this because they absorb the flavors and lend their starch to the sauce. Other potatoes wouldn't work as well." — Adrian Hoffman



"The texture of this dish is killer. The pieces of potato are soft and tender but hold their shape. At the top layer they gain a little bit of crispiness."

Adrian Hoffman
Group Chef
Lark Creek Restaurant Group
San Francisco

MAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY 1	TUESDAY 2	WEDNESDAY 3	THURSDAY 4	5 cinco de mayo	SATURDAY
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14 mother's day	15	16	17	18 18-19 IFMA Sales & Marketin (312) 540-4400, ifmaw		20 20-23 National Restaurant Association Restaurant, Hotel-Motel Show,
21 20-23 National Restaurant As (312) 853-2525, restau	22 sociation Restaurant, Hotel urant.org	23 -Motel Show, Chicago,	24	25	26	Chicago, (312) 853-2525, restaurant.org

28 29 30 31 MEMORIAL DAY

TIP: ROASTING IDAHO® POTATOES

For a variation on this dish, transfer potatoes to a casserole and bake with a chicken or a leg of lamb on top, so the natural juices of the cooking meat drip into and flavor the potatoes as they roast.

www.idahopotato.com



Idaho Potato French Fries with Lime and Cilantro "This is a fresh approach to an American classic. The cilantro, garlic and lime add great flavor and a little bit of a bite." — Marie Grimm "Idaho® potatoes are awesome. They're consistent, very flavorful and have high starch content, which makes fries nice and fluffy inside." Marie Grimm Director of R&D/Corporate Chef Hard Rock Cafe Orlando, Fla.

JUNE

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

					1	2	3
7	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	11	12	13	14 FLAG DAY	15	16	17
	18 Father's day	19 19-22 HITEC 2006, Minneapolis	20 , (800) 646-4387, hitec.org	21 FIRST DAY OF SUMMER	22	23	24
	25 25-27 Southwest Foodservice E	26 xpo, Houston, (800) 395-2	27 872,	28	29	30	
	www.restaurantville.com						

TIP: FRYING IDAHO® POTATOES

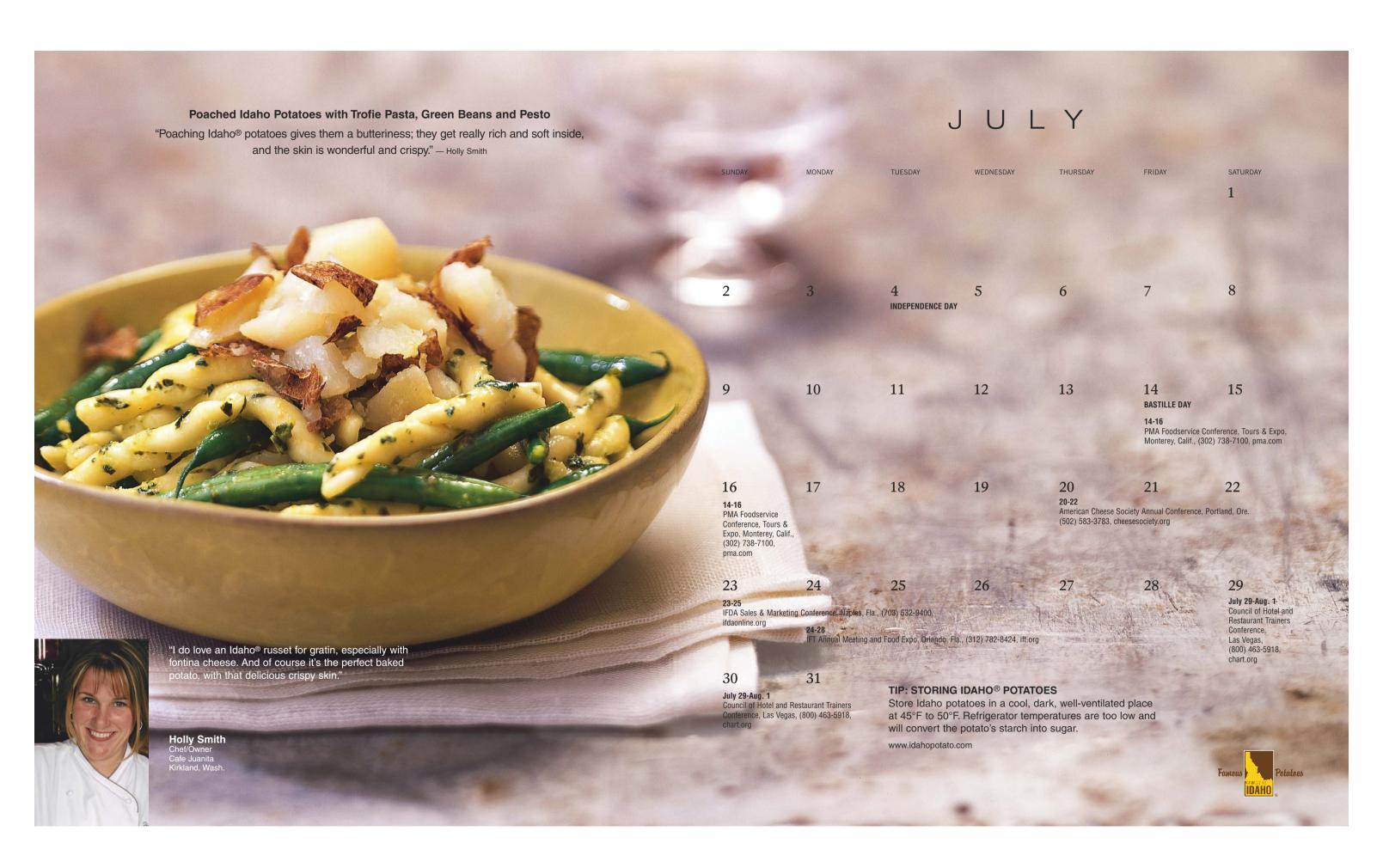
MONDAY

When making french fries, blanch Idaho potatoes before frying. This prevents the fries from sticking together while cooking and ensures that they will cook all the way through.

www.idahopotato.com



SATURDAY





SEPTEMBER Idaho Potato Gnocchi with Maine Lobster "The texture of these gnocchi is light and tender, not heavy and dense like a store-bought variety. And you really taste the potato." — Brian Hinshaw SATURDAY 2 8-10 Florida Restaurant Show, Orlando, (888) 372-3976, frashow.com LABOR DAY 11 12 14 15 16 Florida Restaurant Show, Orlando, (888) 372-3976, frashow.com 18 19 22 23 ROSH HASHANAH BEGINS AT SUNDOWN FIRST DAY OF AUTUMN "I love Idaho® potatoes because they bake up so great. They're the best baking potatoes there are, and they're perfect for gnocchi." September is National Potato Month. TIP: BLANCHING IDAHO® POTATO GNOCCHI When blanching Idaho potato gnocchi, be sure the water is heavily salted, which helps the **Brian Hinshaw** gnocchi float and cook more evenly. If you use unsalted water, the gnocchi will drop to the Regional Chef Cameron Mitchell Restaurants Columbus, Ohio bottom of the pan and stick. www.idahopotato.com

OCTOBER Idaho Potato and Pumpkin Hash "Slowly cooking the potatoes in oil makes them really nice and rich, and allows all the nutrients to remain. It gives the potatoes a dense, full-bodied, creamy texture that is very even, from the outside all the way to the middle." — Randy Zweiban SUNDAY MONDAY THURSDAY 5 YOM KIPPUR BEGINS AT SUNDOWN 10 11 12 13 COLUMBUS DAY 17 15 16 18 19 20 20-24 PMA Fresh Summit International Convention & Expo, San Diego, (302) 738-7100, pma.com 23 24 25 26 27 Society for Foodservice Management National Conference, Las Vegas, (502) 583-3783, sfm-online.org PMA Fresh Summit International Convention & Expo, San Diego, (302) 738-7100, pma.com 29 30 31 DAYLIGHT SAVING HALLOWEEN TIME ENDS "I like that we're able to order Idaho® potatoes by size. All the potatoes in the case are about the same size and shape, so they all cook about the same way." TIP: PEELING IDAHO® POTATOES After you peel and dice Idaho potatoes, if you're not using them right away, put them in cool water with a little bit of lemon juice to prevent them from Randy Zweiban Executive Chef/Partner Nacional 27 discoloring. (Use 1 tablespoon per half gallon of water.) www.idahopotato.com

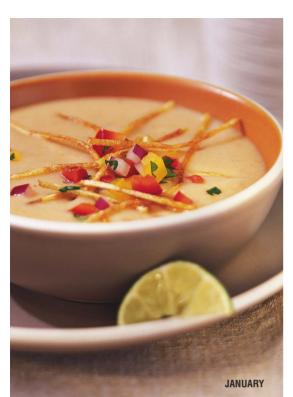
SATURDAY

21





IDAHO® POTATOES In Season



FEBRUARY

JANUARY

Idaho Potato and Chipotle Soup

Yield: 6 servings

Anthony Lamas, Chef/Owner Seviche, Louisville, Ky.

Ingredients

- 2 pounds Idaho® potatoes, peeled and quartered (or 4 cups mashed Idaho® potatoes)
- medium Spanish onion, roughly chopped
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- tablespoon olive oil
- 2 ounces canned chipotle chiles with adobo sauce
- 4 cups chicken stock or water
- cup heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- teaspoon ground coriander
- cup grated smoked Cheddar cheese, plus additional for garnish

Kosher salt, to taste

White pepper, to taste

½ red bell pepper, seeded and diced

1/2 yellow bell pepper, seeded and diced

1/4 cup fresh cilantro, chopped

1 tablespoon chopped red onion

1 cup Crispy Shoestring Potatoes (recipe follows)

Crispy Shoestring Potatoes 2 medium unpeeled Idaho® potatoes, scrubbed Peanut oil for deep-frying, as needed Kosher salt, to taste

Directions

- 1. In a large pan of salted water, cook potatoes in 140°F water for 20 minutes, then bring to a boil until potatoes are soft. Drain.
- 2. In a sauté pan over high heat, sauté onions and garlic in olive oil for 1 minute; add chipotle chiles and adobo sauce; lower heat to medium; continue cooking until onions are soft and translucent, 2 to 4 minutes.
- 3. Combine potatoes, stock or water, cream, cumin and coriander in large saucepan. Bring to gentle boil. Reduce heat to low; simmer 10 minutes. Turn off heat: let cool about 5 minutes.
- 4. Purée with immersion blender until smooth, gradually adding cheese. Season to taste with kosher salt and white pepper.
- 5. Prepare Crispy Shoestring Potatoes: Using a mandolin, cut potatoes into shoestrings. Pat dry. Deep-fry in 350°F peanut oil until crisp, 1½ to 2 minutes. Drain; set on paper towel. Sprinkle with salt: reserve.
- 6. In small bowl, mix together bell peppers, cilantro and onion. Squeeze lime over; mix in juice. Season to taste with salt.
- 7. Per portion: Garnish each bowl of soup with 1 to 2 tablespoons pepper mixture, 1 tablespoon cheese and ¼ cup Crispy Shoestring Potatoes.

FEBRUARY

Spicy Idaho Potato and Chicken Croquettes

Yield: 4 appetizer servings

Russell C. Skall, Corporate Chef Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar Tampa, Fla.

Ingredients

- 10 ounces yucca, peeled, all red skin removed, cut into 3-inch pieces
- 5 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- 10 ounces Idaho® potatoes, peeled, cut into large pieces
- ½ teaspoon each: paprika, finely ground black pepper, onion powder, cavenne pepper, dried oregano, dried thyme, garlic powder
- 34 cup plus 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons salted butter
- Spicy Chicken Stuffing (recipe follows)
- 3 tablespoons shredded smoked Cheddar cheese 2 eggs
- 34 cup fine breadcrumbs

Vegetable shortening, as needed for deep-frying 1 cup Roasted Red Pepper Sauce (For recipe, visit

- www.idahopotato.com)
- 4 sprigs fresh rosemary, for garnish

Directions

- 1. Place yucca in large pan with water to cover and 1½ teaspoons salt. Bring to boil; cook until tender but not mushy, 45 to 50 minutes. Drain well; cool. Remove center vein and any uncooked
- 2. In separate pan, cover potatoes with water and add 1½ teaspoons salt. Boil until tender: drain well: reserve.
- 3. In small dish, make seasoning mixture by combining remaining 2 teaspoons salt, paprika, black pepper, onion powder, cayenne pepper, oregano, thyme and garlic powder. In separate bowl, mix 2 teaspoons seasoning mix with 34 cup flour.
- 4. Prepare Spicy Chicken Stuffing and Roasted Red Pepper Sauce.
- 5. Place potato, yucca, butter, remaining seasoning mix and remaining 2 tablespoons flour in food processor. Blend to dough consistency, about 1 minute.
- 6. Using a tablespoon, portion out 20 mounds of potato mixture onto a cutting board. Coat hands with seasoned flour; roll each portion of potato mixture into a ball. Make indentation in each ball; fill with ½ teaspoon of Spicy Chicken Stuffing and ½ teaspoon shredded cheese. Gently fold potato mixture around stuffing; roll each ball into a cylinder about 2 inches long and 34 inch wide.
- 7. In small bowl, beat eggs with 1 tablespoon water. Place breadcrumbs in another bowl. Dip each croquette in remaining seasoned flour, then egg wash, and then breadcrumbs. Place on paperlined sheet pan.
- 8. In deep-sided pan over medium-high heat, melt enough vegetable shortening for deep-frying (about 2 inches); heat to 350°F. Fry croquettes until golden brown, about 3 minutes. Drain well on paper towels; season lightly with salt and pepper.

9. Serve with Roasted Red Pepper Sauce and garnish with sprig of rosemary.

Spicy Chicken Stuffing

1 tablespoon clarified butter (or canola oil)

1/4 cup minced yellow onion

2 teaspoons minced jalapeño peppers

1/4 teaspoon minced garlic

1 pinch ground cumin

1 pinch dried thyme

1 pinch dried oregano

1 pinch chili powder

1/8 teaspoon kosher salt

2 ounces boneless, skinless chicken breast, minced

1 pinch sugar

1 teaspoon white vinegar

2 teaspoons tomato paste

1. Heat butter in medium sauté pan over mediumhigh heat; sauté onion and jalapeños until soft, about 3 minutes. Add garlic, cumin, thyme, oregano, chili powder and salt; cook 1 minute. 2. Add chicken to pan along with sugar and vinegar; cook until chicken is no longer pink, 3 to 4 minutes. Add tomato paste; cook 1 minute to incorporate. Transfer to small bowl; cool.

MARCH

Idaho Potato Ravioli with Minted Pea Sauce

Yield: 8 entrée servings

Robert Gadsby, Executive Chef Noé, Los Angeles and Houston

Ingredients

2 eggs, lightly beaten

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

8 teaspoons water, plus additional as needed

2 cups all-purpose flour

1/8 teaspoon salt

4 pounds medium Idaho® potatoes, unpeeled, scrubbed

2 tablespoons peanut oil

8 shallots, peeled and minced

2 cups grated Gruyère cheese

Salt, to taste

Freshly ground white pepper, to taste

Cornstarch, as needed

Olive oil, as needed

8 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil or lemon oil, for drizzling

Minted Pea Sauce (recipe follows)

8 teaspoons freshly shaved Parmesan cheese

8 teaspoons bacon bits (optional)

24 to 32 pea-shoot tendrils (optional)

Minted Pea Sauce Yield: 2 cups

1 tablespoon olive oil

½ medium white onion, diced

½ clove garlic, minced

34 teaspoon ground cumin

8 ounces fresh spinach leaves, stemmed, cleaned, dried

5 ounces shelled fresh peas

3 tablespoons fresh mint leaves

11/2 cups potato water from boiling potatoes (or vegetable stock)

1/8 teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg Salt, to taste White pepper, to taste

Directions

1. Prepare ravioli dough: In small bowl, combine eggs, olive oil and water; mix well. In another bowl, combine flour and 1/8 teaspoon salt. Make a well in center of flour; pour in egg mixture. Using your hands, gradually work flour into egg mixture, adding more water, 1 teaspoon at a time, if needed to make a dough.

2. Transfer dough to a clean work surface; knead until it is smooth and elastic, 6 to 7 minutes. Do not overwork dough or allow it to warm. Divide into 4 pieces. Wrap in plastic; refrigerate at least 1 hour, but no longer than 2 days.

3. Put potatoes in large pot; cover with salted

water. Cook until soft and easily pierced, 15 to 20 minutes. Drain, reserving 2 cups cooking liquid. Let potatoes cool 3 minutes; peel while still hot, using a knife and a towel or napkin. Pass peeled potatoes through a food mill or sieve while still

4. Heat peanut oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat until oil slides easily across the pan. Add shallots; cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 5 minutes; let cool. Add shallots, cheese and salt and white pepper to taste to potatoes; mix to combine.

5. Remove one piece ravioli dough from refrigerator: roll out in pasta machine.

6. Lay rolled dough on a clean work surface. Using a tablespoon, place spoonfuls of potato purée in three rows over half the pasta sheet, leaving 2 inches between each spoonful. Brush other half of sheet lightly with water; fold over the first. Run a finger around each pocket of filling, press-

7. Using a round cookie cutter (about 3 inches in diameter for entrée-size raviolis), cut ravioli. Transfer to baking sheet dusted with cornstarch. Repeat with remaining dough and filling. Set filled ravioli aside to dry for 15 minutes; turn and dry 15 minutes more

8. Prepare Minted Pea Sauce: Heat olive oil in saucepan; add onion, garlic and cumin; gently sauté 7 to 8 minutes, until light gold. Chop spinach to a chiffonade; add to pan along with peas, mint and 11/2 cups reserved potato water or stock. Bring to simmer; cook until spinach has wilted, 3 to 4 minutes.

9. Transfer sauce to blender, in batches if necessary; blend until very smooth, about 1 minute. Strain; discard solids. Return strained sauce to pan; heat to a gentle simmer. Add nutmeg, salt and white pepper to taste; reserve.

10. Refill pot with salted water; bring to boil. Add ravioli; cook until tender, about 3 minutes. Drain. 11. Heat small amount of olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat; add ravioli flat-side-up; sauté until golden-brown, 15 to 30 seconds. Gently turn and cook other side; reserve.





12. Reheat sauce, thinning with a small amount of potato water, if necessary. Plate 3 or 5 ravioli per portion and sauce with about 1 tablespoon Minted Pea Sauce per piece. Drizzle each portion with 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil or lemon oil. Garnish with 1 teaspoon Parmesan shavings, and chopped bacon and pea-shoot tendrils if desired.





APRIL

Idaho Potato and Asparagus Pancakes

Yield: 4 servings

Emile Castillo, Executive Chef Le Parker Meridien, New York

Ingredients

- 1 pound medium Idaho $^{\tiny{(8)}}$ potatoes, unpeeled $^{1\!\!/}$ cup whole milk
- 1½ tablespoons flour
- 2 eggs
- 1 egg white
- 5 ounces fresh asparagus
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 4 ounces clarified butter
- 4 cups baby greens

IDAHO® POTATOES In Season

½ cup balsamic vinaigrette (your recipe) 15 slices smoked salmon, 1 ounce each 1 cup cherry tomatoes

Directions

- 1. Put potatoes in large pot of salted water; boil until tender, 18 to 20 minutes. Drain and cool slightly; peel with sharp knife while potatoes are still warm.
- Put potatoes through a food mill into a large bowl. Stir in milk and flour. Add eggs and egg white, one at a time. Mix gently until milk and eggs are incorporated and mixture is the consistency of pastry cream.
- 3. Boil asparagus in salted water until tender-crisp, 3 to 4 minutes. Slice on bias into ¼-inch pieces, reserving a few asparagus tips for garnish if desired. Add to potato mixture along with salt and pepper to taste.
- 4. Heat 1 to 2 ounces clarified butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Spoon 2 ounces (about ¼ cup for each pancake) potato mixture into pan to make oval pancake; cook until golden brown, 3 minutes per side. Repeat to make 12 pancakes, adding butter as needed; reserve warm.
- 5. Toss greens with vinaigrette; reserve.
- 6. Per portion: Place a 4-inch metal ring on one side of a dinner plate; line with 3 slices salmon. Remove ring carefully, leaving the salmon; fill salmon ring with dressed greens; garnish with cherry tomatoes. Fan 3 potato pancakes on other side of plate; garnish if desired with reserved asparagus tips. (For alternate plating, as shown in photo, stack potato pancakes, top with salmon; garnish with dressed greens.)

MAY

"Baker's-Style" Idaho Potatoes with Morels and Sweet Onions

Yield: 4 servings

Adrian Hoffman, Group Chef Lark Creek Restaurant Group, San Francisco

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 sweet onion, such as Vidalia, Walla Walla or Maui, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 cup fresh morel mushrooms, cleaned and halved (if fresh morels are not available, substitute dried; reconstitute in water)
- 5 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves picked, chopped
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 5 small Idaho® potatoes, peeled, sliced into 1/4-inch disks
- 4 cups chicken stock or meat stock, boiled to reduce by half
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 teaspoons fresh chives, snipped in 3/8-inch lengths

Directions

- 1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
- 2. Melt butter in large ovenproof sauté pan over

medium heat. Add onions, morels and thyme; season with salt and pepper. (If using commercial stock, add salt carefully.) Cook gently until onions are soft, 8 to 10 minutes. Add potatoes; gently stir to mix. Add enough reduced stock to barely cover potatoes; add bay leaf. Bring to boil; immediately remove from heat and transfer to oven.

- 3. Bake until potatoes are cooked, the liquid has reduced to a sauce-like consistency and top layer of potatoes is lightly browned, 40 to 50 minutes.
- 4. Sprinkle with chives.

JUNE

Idaho Potato French Fries with Lime and Cilantro Yield: 8 servings

Marie Grimm, Director of R&D/Corporate Chef Hard Rock Cafe, Orlando, Fla.

Ingredients

- 4 pounds medium Idaho® potatoes, unpeeled and scrubbed
- Canola oil for deep-frying, as needed
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1/4 cup minced fresh cilantro

Directions

- 1. Using a french-fry cutter, cut potatoes lengthwise into ½-inch by ½-inch strips. Place in cold water to prevent oxidization and to wash out excess starch.
- 2. Blanch potatoes: Bring a large pot of water to boil; add potato strips. Allow water to return to a full boil; cook 30 seconds more; drain. Place on lined cookie sheet; hold refrigerated.
- 3. Combine garlic, lime juice and salt in small dish; refrigerate 1 hour.
- 4. Remove potatoes from refrigerator. Thoroughly pat dry. Deep-fry in 365°F canola oil for 3 to 6 minutes, until crispy and golden brown. Drain, then place in a stainless-steel bowl; reserve warm. 5. Stir cilantro into garlic mixture. Add to fries, tossing to coat. Serve in a paper cone.

JULY

Poached Idaho Potatoes with Trofie Pasta, Green Beans and Pesto

Yield: 4 entrée servings

Holly Smith, Chef/Owner Cafe Juanita, Kirkland, Wash.

Ingredients

- 2 medium Idaho® potatoes, unpeeled, washed, rubbed clean and dry
- 4 cups extra-virgin olive oil, or enough to cover potatoes
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- ½ cup chicken stock or vegetable stock
- 1 pound trofie pasta (penne, gemelli or orecchiette may be substituted)

26 green beans, trimmed and washed Ice water

4 ounces crème fraîche Kosher salt, to taste Pinch coarse sea salt

Pesto

½ pound fresh basil leaves

3 cloves garlic

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1/4 cup pine nuts or blanched almonds (optional)

1 lemon, zested and then juiced

1½ teaspoons kosher salt

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper

1/4 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Directions

- 1. Put potatoes in heavy-bottomed pan; add enough olive oil to cover potatoes. Heat oil to just below a simmer, about 200°F. (Do not let oil reach a higher temperature or potato jackets will be too crisp.) Cook potatoes 45 minutes to 1 hour, until tender with a slight resistance when pierced with sharp knife. (Potatoes will continue to cook after they are removed from heat.) Remove from heat, leaving potatoes in the oil. Let stand at least 1 hour, or refrigerate up to 24 hours.
- 2. Bring 4 quarts water to boil with 2 tablespoons kosher salt; stir in pasta. Cook until pasta is tender but not soft. Drain and reserve refrigerated,
- 3. Blanch green beans in salted boiling water until just tender, 1 to 3 minutes. Drain and plunge into ice water to stop cooking, 1 to 2 minutes. Drain; cut into 1-inch pieces. Reserve refrigerated, up
- 4. Prepare Pesto: In food processor, combine basil and garlic until finely chopped. Scrape down bowl once; run for an additional minute. With motor running, add oil, nuts if using, lemon zest, lemon juice, salt and cayenne pepper. Scrape down bowl; process 30 seconds more, adding more oil if necessary to smooth out texture, and more lemon if desired.
- 5. Place Parmigiano-Reggiano in bowl; add basil mixture; stir to combine. Adjust seasoning to taste. Reserve refrigerated, up to 1 day
- 6. For service, reheat potatoes in olive oil to 200°F. 7. In heavy-bottomed sauté pan large enough to hold all the pasta, warm stock at medium heat. Add pasta; cook until most of stock absorbs into pasta, 3 to 4 minutes.
- 8. Add green beans and crème fraîche; increase heat to medium high; cook to a sauce-like consistency, 2 to 4 minutes. Taste for desired doneness of pasta and beans and add a bit more stock or water if necessary.
- 9. Reduce heat to medium; add half of the pesto and kosher salt to taste. Mix well; remove from heat
- 10. Divide pasta mixture among 4 pasta bowls or plates. Carefully remove potatoes from oil; drain on paper towel. Cut potatoes in half and crumble one piece over each portion of pasta. Season potatoes with a pinch of sea salt and serve at once.

AUGUST

Idaho Potato Napoleon

Yield: 4 servings

Karl Matz, Culinary R&D Manager The Cheesecake Factory, Calabasas Hills, Calif.

Ingredients

5 medium Idaho® potatoes, peeled Herbed Goat Cheese (recipe follows) Canola oil, for deep-frying All-purpose flour, as needed 4 eggs, whisked

3 to 4 cups panko breadcrumbs Heirloom Tomato Confit (recipe follows) Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste 4 tablespoons shredded Parmesan cheese

4 teaspoons julienned fresh basil

Herbed Goat Cheese

12 ounces soft goat cheese

1 cup grated Parmesan cheese

½ cup mascarpone cheese, softened (or substitute cream cheese)

- 4 teaspoons minced shallots
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 pinches black pepper

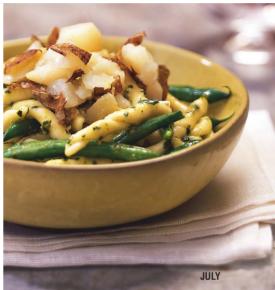
Heirloom Tomato Confit

- 1 pound assorted heirloom tomatoes, blanched, peeled, seeded, cut in 1/4-inch dice
- 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, smashed
- 1 sprig fresh thyme
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 pinch sugar
- 1 tablespoon seasoned rice vinegar
- 2 tablespoons julienned fresh basil
- 1 tablespoon minced parsley
- 2 teaspoons minced shallots
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 pinch minced fresh thyme

Directions

- 1. Slice potatoes on mandolin to 1/4-inch-thick disks. Select 60 disks of at least 11/2 inches in diameter: reserve remaining pieces for other use. Par-cook disks for 2 minutes in boiling water; drain well. Arrange in a single layer on baking sheet to air-dry and cool, about 5 minutes. (Do not shock in cold water.)
- 2. Prepare Herbed Goat Cheese: Mix all ingredients together in bowl with wooden spoon; reserve.
- 3. To assemble each of 12 Napoleons, place a potato slice on a work surface; top with a teaspoon Herbed Goat Cheese. Continue layering: a potato slice, a teaspoon of cheese, a potato slice, a teaspoon of cheese, a potato slice, a teaspoon of cheese and finish with a potato slice. Gently press and compact so Napoleon measures about 21/2 inches in height and cheese is neatly contained. Repeat to make a total of 12 Napoleons. Transfer

- to clean sheet pan; refrigerate 20 to 30 minutes, or up to 1 day.
- 4. Prepare Heirloom Tomato Confit: Place tomatoes, olive oil, garlic, thyme sprig, 1/4 teaspoon salt and sugar in shallow baking dish. Bake 1 hour in preheated 250°F oven. Remove tomatoes from oil, reserving oil. Cool tomatoes; discard garlic and thyme.
- 5. In a stainless mixing bowl, whisk together 1/4 cup of rice vinegar and oil reserved from tomatoes. Add cooled tomatoes, basil, parsley, shallots, pepper, remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt and chopped thyme; mix well. Reserve at room temperature,



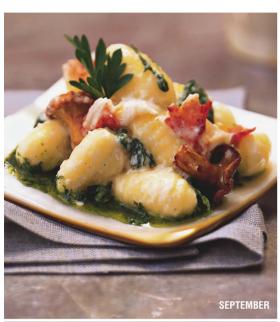


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covered, up to 1 hour.

6. Remove Napoleons from refrigerator. Carefully dip each in flour, shaking off excess. Dip in egg wash then gently roll in panko crumbs, pressing crumbs between the layers.

7. In deep, medium-gauge saucepan, heat oil to 300°F. Working in batches of four, carefully place Napoleons in oil; cook until golden, about 5 min-





utes. Transfer with slotted spoon to paper towel: reserve warm

8. Divide Heirloom Tomato Confit among four plates. Carefully cut each Napoleon in half; place 6 pieces per plate on top of confit, arranging cutside-up in desired plate presentation. Sprinkle each piece with salt, pepper, and ½ teaspoon Parmesan. Scatter 1 teaspoon basil over tomatoes on each plate.

SEPTEMBER

Idaho Potato Gnocchi with Maine Lobster

Yield: 4 appetizer servings

Brian Hinshaw, Regional Chef Cameron Mitchell Restaurants, Columbus, Ohio

Ingredients

4 ounces chanterelle mushrooms. halved or quartered if large

1½ tablespoons olive oil 1 tablespoon minced shallot

1¼ cups heavy cream

Idaho® Potato Gnocchi, cooked (recipe follows) 4 ounces Maine lobster meat, cooked, chunked

1 ounce roasted garlic purée Kosher salt, to taste

White pepper, to taste

2 ounces baby arugula, torn

1 teaspoon butter

4 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

8 teaspoons basil oil (recipe follows) Parsley sprigs for garnish

Gnocchi

1 pound Idaho® potatoes, unpeeled 34 to 1 cup all-purpose flour

2 large egg yolks

1 tablespoon kosher salt

1 to 2 tablespoons olive oil

Basil oil

3 cups loosely packed basil leaves

1 cup olive oil

Directions

1. In large sauté pan over medium heat, cook mushrooms in olive oil until soft, about 5 minutes. Add shallots, cook 2 to 3 minutes.

2. Add cream, cooked gnocchi, lobster, garlic pureé, salt and white pepper; bring to boil. Reduce to medium heat; simmer until gnocchi are warmed through, 1 to 2 minutes.

3. Add arugula; toss briefly to wilt, about 10 seconds; stir in butter and remove from heat.

4. Serve while hot, garnishing each portion with 1 tablespoon Parmesan cheese, 2 teaspoons basil oil and a sprig of parsley. (If desired, deep-fry parsley at 275°F for 5 seconds; drain on paper towel; sprinkle with salt.)

Gnocchi

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Prick potatoes with fork to release steam while baking; bake until easily pierced with fork, about 1 hour.

2. Halve potatoes, scoop out flesh. Press through ricer onto a lightly floured board. Make a well in center; sprinkle with half the flour; add egg yolks and salt; cut together with a bench scraper until just incorporated. Examine the texture of the dough, and add more flour if necessary, sprinkling on a little at a time until dough achieves desired consistency. Too much flour will make the gnocchi dry, so add flour carefully. Use just enough so dough is tacky and sticks together, but doesn't stick to your hands. Dough should pull away from board and be tender but not elastic. Use more flour if needed to dust surface of board.

3. Roll dough into ball. Cut off small section; roll into ½-inch-thick rope; cut into uniform pieces about 1/2-inch long. Roll each piece over a gnocchi paddle (or imprint with a fork); place on a sheet pan lined with parchment paper and dusted with flour. Repeat until all gnocchi are rolled. (Gnocchi may be frozen at this point for later use.)

4. Cook gnocchi in barely simmering, heavily salted water for 2 minutes; shock in ice bath; drain. To prevent sticking, gently toss with olive oil. (May be reserved refrigerated at this point 3 to 4 days.)

1. Blanch basil leaves very briefly (about 2 seconds) in boiling salted water; shock immediately in ice bath; squeeze out water.

2. In a blender, purée basil and ½ cup olive oil to a paste; add remaining ½ cup olive oil.

3. Refrigerate overnight; strain. Will hold refrigerated up to 2 weeks.

OCTOBER

Idaho Potato and Pumpkin Hash

Yield: 4 servings

Randy Zweiban, Executive Chef/Partner Nacional 27, Chicago

Ingredients

3 cups Idaho® potatoes, peeled, cut in ¼-inch dice

6 cups plus 2 tablespoons canola oil

3 cups calabaza pumpkin, peeled, seeded, cut in ¼-inch dice (or use regular pumpkin for a denser consistency)

½ teaspoon ground cumin, toasted

½ teaspoon ground coriander, toasted

½ teaspoon ground black pepper, toasted

½ teaspoon kosher salt

½ teaspoon sugar

½ teaspoon paprika

1/4 teaspoon cinnamon

1/3 cup plus 4 teaspoons Orange Aioli (recipe follows)

Orange Oil (recipe follows)

1/4 cup smoked bacon, finely diced Kosher salt, to taste

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

4 fresh chives, chopped

4 Idaho® potato gaufrettes (optional)

Orange Aioli and Orange Oil 1 cup freshly squeezed orange juice

- 1 egg yolk (or substitute 2½ tablespoons pasteurized egg yolks)
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- ½ tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 cup canola oil
- 1 to 2 tablespoons water

Directions

- 1. Combine potatoes and 6 cups oil in heavy saucepan. Cook over medium heat until to 170°F. Adjust heat to maintain temperature and cook until potatoes are fork tender, 12 to 18 minutes, taking care to maintain temperature. Remove potatoes with slotted spoon. Drain on paper towels, reserving the oil. Set aside to cool.
- 2. In mixing bowl, toss pumpkin with cumin, coriander, black pepper, salt, sugar, paprika, cinnamon and remaining 2 tablespoons oil. Bake on sheet pan in preheated 350°F oven until pumpkin is fork tender, 15 to 20 minutes; cool.
- 3. Prepare Orange Aioli: In a sauté pan over medium heat, reduce orange juice to ¼ cup; cool. In small bowl, whisk together egg yolk, lemon juice and mustard; slowly whisk in oil. Add half the reduced orange juice. Thin with water to desired consistency.
- 4. Prepare Orange Oil: Transfer remaining reduced orange juice to a bowl and whisk in ½ cup reserved oil from cooking potatoes.
- 5. In sauté pan over medium heat, slowly render bacon until meaty but not crisp, about 5 minutes. Pour off some of the fat. Add potatoes and pumpkin; season to taste with salt and pepper and heat gently. Remove from heat and stir in 1/3 cup Orange Aioli.
- 6. Divide potato mixture among 4 ring molds that have been placed on serving plates. Press gently to compact then carefully remove molds. Top each with 1 teaspoon Orange Aioli, drizzle 1 to 1½ tablespoons Orange Oil around rings. Garnish each with chopped chives and an Idaho® potato gaufrette.

NOVEMBER

Idaho Potato Celery-Root Skordalia

Yield: 4 servings (about 3 cups)

Ana Sortun, Chef/Owner Oleana, Cambridge, Mass.

- 1 small celery root, about 1 pound 2½ teaspoons salt, divided use ½ tablespoon whole-milk plain yogurt, preferably Greek-style
- 1 Idaho® potato, about 12 ounces, peeled and quartered
- 3/8 cup whole blanched almonds
- 2 to 3 cloves garlic, roughly chopped 1½ teaspoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil Salt and black pepper, to taste

Directions

1. Cut both ends of celery root so it stands on a cutting board; peel in a spiral pattern with a sharp

knife or peeler; rinse to remove any dirt; cut into eighths. Place pieces in medium saucepan; cover with warm water and ½ teaspoon salt. Bring to boil; reduce to a simmer. Cook until fork-tender, 20 to 25 minutes. Drain, reserving 1 cup of cooking water.

- 2. While celery root is still hot, combine in food processor with yogurt and ¼ cup of reserved cooking liquid. Purée with metal blade until smooth and creamy. Transfer purée to medium mixing bowl; reserve.
- 3. Place potato quarters in medium saucepan with water to cover and 1½ teaspoons salt. Bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium; simmer until tender, 15 to 18 minutes; drain. While potatoes are still hot, press through a ricer or food mill. Fold potatoes into celery root mixture.
- 4. Combine almonds, garlic, remaining ¾ cup reserved cooking liquid, lemon juice, olive oil and remaining 1 teaspoon salt in a blender. Blend until completely smooth and creamy, about 2 minutes. 5. Fold nut mixture into potato/celery-root mixture.
- Season to taste with salt and black pepper.
 6. Serve at room temperature or cold, as an appetizer or hors d'oeuvre. This dish pairs well with grilled bread, grilled beef kebabs or skewers of

DECEMBER

Idaho Potato Quiche

Yield: 4 servings

Martial Noguier, Executive Chef one sixtyblue, Chicago

marinated, grilled mushrooms.

- 4 medium Idaho[®] potatoes, unpeeled, scrubbed Olive oil, as needed Salt. to taste
- Black pepper, to taste
- 4 cups kosher salt
- 1 egg
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 pinch cayenne pepper
- 1 pinch nutmeg
- ½ cup whole milk
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 4 ounces Swiss cheese, grated
- 4 ounces ham, chopped
- Frisée salad, as needed

Directions

- 1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Rub potatoes with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and black pepper. Prick potatoes with fork. Fill small sheet pan with 4 cups kosher salt; place potatoes on salt. Bake until a knife easily pierces potatoes, 40 to 55 minutes. Remove from oven and cool; reduce oven to 350°F. 2. In a small bowl, whisk egg and egg yolk with a pinch of salt, cayenne pepper and nutmeg; whisk in milk and cream.
- 3. With a sharp knife, slice off top ¼ inch of cooled potatoes; scoop out insides, leaving ¼ inch of potato all around to form a shell. (Reserve inside of potato for another use.)
- 4. Return potato shells to salt on sheet pan. Divide





cheese and ham among potatoes and then add

5. Carefully return potatoes to oven; bake at 350°F until eggs are softly set, 15 to 20 minutes. Serve as an entrée with frisée salad dressed with balsamic vinaigrette.



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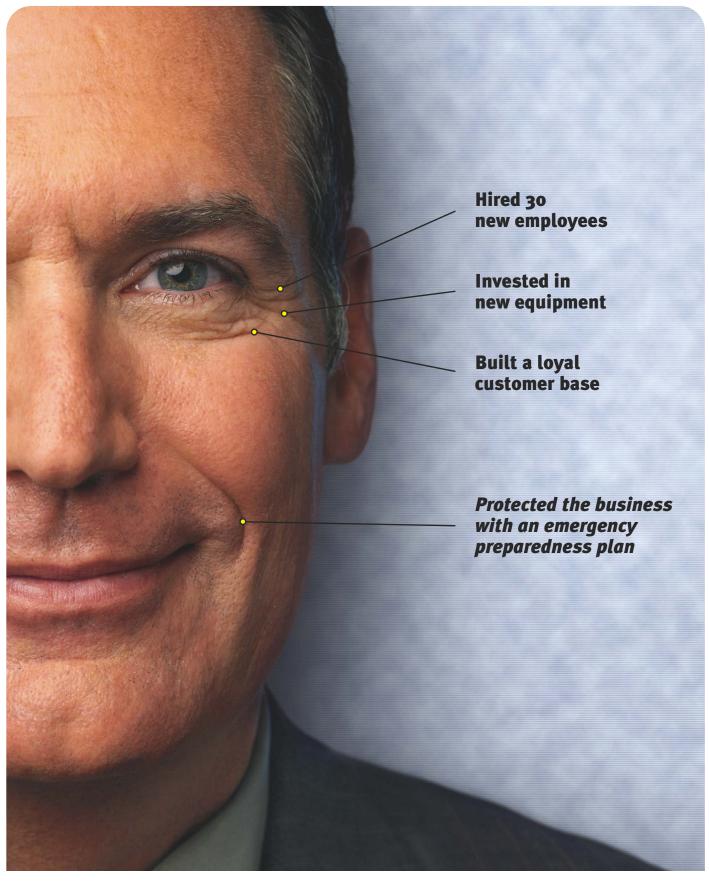
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f Lisa Tillman never saw another drop of partially hydrogenated oil, it'd be too soon. "At least I won't have to see it at Jason's," she says.

After five years of label scrutiny, vendor wheedling and recipe revamping, the director of product development for 142-unit Jason's Deli has squeezed every bit of the stuff out of inventory.

"We found it in the most unexpected places, and it took a lot of work on our part and negotiation with our vendors to get rid of it all," Tillman says. "We worked really hard to ensure flavors were just as good or better than before and to make this as transparent to our guests as possible."

The fast-casual sandwich chain officially celebrated trans-fat freedom in April.

Trans-fat busting at Beaumont, Texas-based Jason's is just one example of the "it's better, so just do it" decisions that the company stands on. Others include the April addition of panini grills and more organic products on the roster.

Although the changes may be invisible to the customer, behind the scenes, components are different. Chocolate mousse, for example, used to include trans-fat-laden whipped topping with milk solids. Now, unit workers whip it fresh with cream.

Jason's made these changes without raising prices. Same-store sales for July, August and September were up 8 percent to 10 percent over the same months in 2004. How much of that's attributable to the trans-fat-free products is debatable, but feedback from customers indicates, "We are getting some new guests here purely because we made the switch," founder Rusty Coco says. "Because we're 100 percent trans-fat free, they don't have to shop the menu to find what is and what isn't OK."

Good Timing

Jason's timing is good, says Harry Balzer, vice president of Port Washington, N.Y.-based NPD Group, which polls consumers on 20 health and diet issues every other week. "Trans fat has steadily increased in awareness to the point that it's now one of their top three concerns," he says. "Jason's action puts them ahead of the curve. The fact that they're not charging customers more for a healthier menu is crucial."

Jason's completes the trans-fat purge just as it enters California. "We expect Califor-

nia to be huge for us," Coco says. "Healthy eating and organics are very important to consumers in California markets."

While Jason's celebrates its emancipation from bad fat, Tillman has moved on. She is developing more hot options such as pastas, paninis and wraps to drive dinner business. She's shaping more "big belly" sandwiches—those stuffed with 6 ounces or more of meat. And she's planning entree salads and a salad-bar revamp with more organic produce and soups.

Hot Off the Grill

Jason's began developing panini sandwiches after a Coco family member ate them all over Italy. "We believed the use of the panini grill could really enhance flavors and textures of our ingredients, but it took over a year to accomplish," Tillman says. In addition to recipe development and the equipment purchase, Jason's had to work out the logistics of space and additional power supply for the grills.

Tillman initially tested paninis with 3 ounces of meat but later doubled it. "It may not be a traditional panini, but it's more in line with the value customers expect from Jason's," she says.

Jason's offers panini two ways: The Chicken Panini, \$6.25, features olive-oil-

basted French bread with basil pesto, grilled chicken breast, provolone cheese, roma tomatoes and spinach. The Southwest-style Smokey Jack Panini, \$6.25, comes with smoked turkey breast, bacon, jalapeño jack cheese, Russian dressing, guacamole and roma tomatoes. More versions are in development for January testing.

According to Tillman, the paninis have been a huge success, scoring in the 4½ to 5 range in test, out of a possible five points. Coco says that sales have put the sandwiches in line with other category leaders such as Jason's New Orleans Muffaletta, \$9.50, premium ham and hard salami with provolone and olive mix.

Panini also paved the way for Wrapinis, wrap sandwiches grilled in the panini machine. In April, Jason's introduced the best-selling Grilled Portobello Wrapini, \$6.25, Italian-dressing-marinated, grilled Portobello mushrooms with avocado spread, pico de gallo, spinach and Asiago cheese; and the Chicken Club Wrapini, \$6.25, chicken breast, bacon, red onions, roma tomatoes, ranch dressing, and Swiss and cheddar cheeses.

Company Loyalty

Jason's menu has been top of mind for Tillman for 27 years. She came to Jason's as a

SNAPSHOT

CONCEPT

Jason's Deli

HEADQUARTERS

Beaumont, Texas

UNITS

142

2005 Systemwide Sales

\$340 million (company estimate)

AVERAGE Unit Volume

\$2.4 million

AVERAGE CHECK

\$7.50

EXPANSION PLANS

3 by year-end; 20 in 2006

MENU SAMPLER

SALADS

Marinated Chicken Breast Salad, with cheddar cheese, black olives, tomatoes, guacamole, mixed greens and Italian dressing, \$6.50

WRAPS

Spinach Veggie Wrap, with housemade pico de gallo, guacamole, sprouts, mushrooms and Asiago cheese, with a side of picante and choice of fruit, veggies or baked potato chips, \$4.99

BAKED POTATOES

Texas Style Spud, topped with soy-based butter substitute,

smoked barbecue beef brisket and cheddar cheese, \$5.25

ALL-TIME FAVORITE SANDWICHES

Reuben the Great: hot corned beef, Swiss cheese, sauerkraut and Russian dressing on grilled rye bread, with chips and a pickle, \$6.25

The Slim Jim: hot roast beef, fat-free mozzarella, light ranch dressing, lettuce and tomato on a toasted onion bun, with chips and a pickle, \$4.99

The addition of panini grills in April makes pressed sandwiches and wraps a hot new menu option for Jason's customers.



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"We think hot-food options have the potential to boost dinner sales 5 to 10 percent." —Jason's Deli founder Rusty Coco

night-shift line employee in 1978 to help pay for college and never left. After earning a management degree from Lamar University in Beaumont, Tillman became general manager of the flagship store and started working more in product development with Coco. He shared research and development tasks with Tillman for 24 years while she continued as GM. She's been the company's full-time product-development director for the last five years.

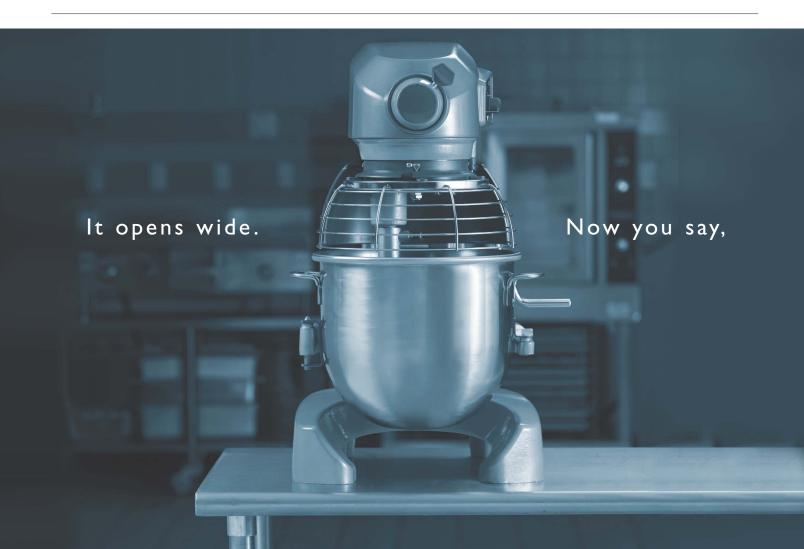
As such, Tillman develops recipes and training materials, spelling out product builds, portion sizes, presentation and food-cost analysis. She oversees testing, which involves in-store sampling, focus groups and customer feedback via surveys and comment cards.

With 80 items, Jason's new core menu comes out each April with two to five new items. The company culls slow movers annually but shuttles them onto an approved recipe list that operators can use as specials. "Some items may be favorites regionally, so we want to give operators the opportunity to continue to feature those where it makes sense," Tillman explains.

Jason's updates training procedures quarterly and posts them on the company's Deli Net intranet, which includes its latest marketing promotions and limited-time offers. "Some of these promotional items may move on to core menus," Tillman says, "but we also have products like chicken gumbo and chicken pot pie that are offered seasonally only."



Giving guests hot options for dinner, Jason's Deli added Chicken Pasta Primo in April, is testing pasta and meatballs, and has other pasta entrees on the way.





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"Removing trans fats from menus was a costly change but not one we could pass on to our customers." —Lisa Tillman, director of product development

Eyes on the Prize

Tillman divides development time between constant re-evaluation of classics like these and the quest to shape new products. Rather than create new dishes on her own, Tillman prefers to hold companywide recipe contests, rewarding best ideas with cash prizes. "Some of our best ideas have come from the field," she says.

For example, a manager and a trainer split the \$1,000 reward for developing trans-fat-free recipes for whipped-creambased topping and chocolate mousse.

Another example: Several employees collaborated to create the Chicken Pasta Primo, \$6.50, penne topped with creamy tomato-basil sauce, grilled chicken breast and Asiago cheese. Launched this year, the

dish was Jason's first stab at a hot entree designed for dinner. It sold so well in test that it went to the core menu in April.

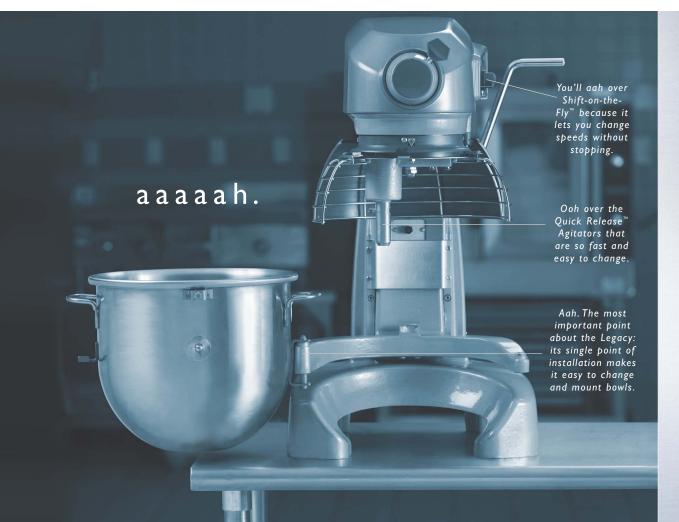
Tillman added a meatballs and marinara pasta special and is exploring more hotpasta LTOs for January.

Jason's is also testing a chicken, fruit and nut salad to potentially launch in spring and is revamping the salad bar to add more organic items like artichoke hearts, kalamata olives and maybe an organic soup.

But Tillman's highest hopes are tied to the current Create a New Sandwich contest, with \$500 going to the winner. "I'm seeing a lot of everything-but-the-kitchensink-type sandwiches and some really creative veggie sandwiches, so who knows where this could go?" she says.



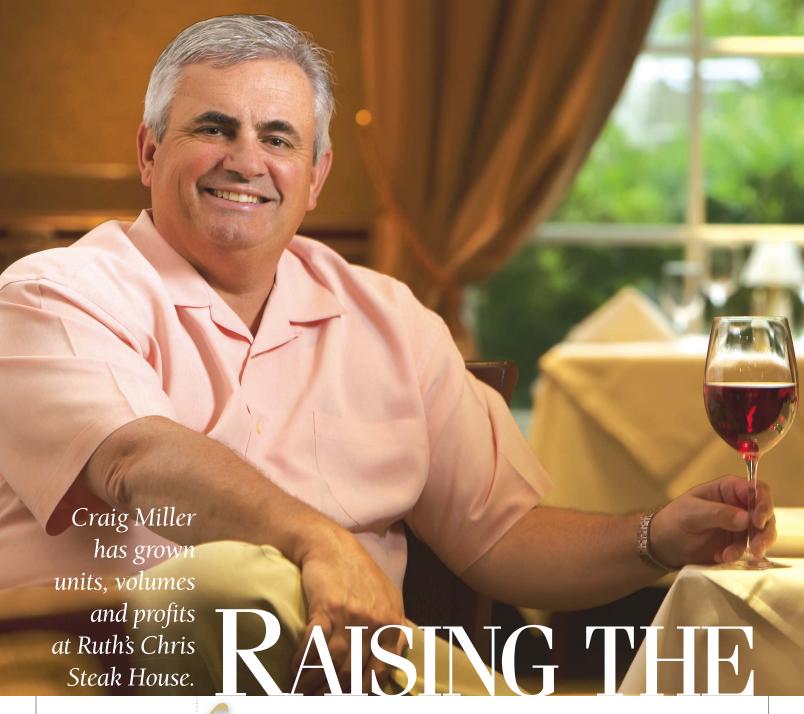
Jason's best-selling sandwich is the New Orleans Muffaletta, premium ham and hard salami or oven-roasted turkey breast with provolone and house-made olive mix.



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lthough Ruth's Chris Steak House doesn't do lunch, the staff at the Winter Park, Fla., restaurant whipped up heaping steak salads for Craig S. Miller and a guest on a recent afternoon. Sure, Miller's status as president and chief executive accounted for the royal treatment. But there are also plen-

ty of people outside the organization who'd argue Miller deserves at least as much care and feeding.

That's because the 91-unit chain is growing again. And while its stock price tumbled this fall from \$23 to \$17 in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma, which closed six units (four have since reopened), analysts remain bullish on the long-term prospects of the company, now

headquartered near Orlando, Fla.

"Katrina dealt a blow, but company recovers quickly," Boston-based CIBC's John Glass wrote in a Sept. 19 equity note. He rates the stock a "sector outperformer." Jeff Omohundro, based in the Charlotte, N.C., office of Wachovia Securities, was impressed with "the decisive and professional manner" Miller's team responded to Hurricane Katrina. Both firms, by the way, underwrote the company's August IPO.

Ruth's Chris has posted double-digit same-store sales in company stores for seven consecutive quarters—a record unmatched by other luxury steakhouse chains. Preliminary third-quarter results showed a 10.6 percent same-store-sales

By David Farkas



increase despite 71 days lost to hurricanerelated closures. Revenues from companystore sales and franchise royalties rose an estimated 5 percent, to \$147.6 million, for the first nine months of the year.

Ruth on Radio

Miller, who signed on in March 2004, says the chain's strong brand image, selectively marketed, is chiefly responsible for the recent surge in guest counts and checkaverage increases. Radio and TV talk-show personality Sean Hannity, for example, is a spokesman for Ruth's Chris because his mostly male listeners match the chain's customer profile. Ads also appear on popular Internet sites such as theatermania.com

and golf.com. The company's redesigned Web site has enhanced both the gift-card program and online reservation system.

The push toward technology comes from Vice President of Marketing Tony Lavely, a former Domino's Pizza executive who also worked for a sporting-goods dotcom. Since joining the company in August '04, he has replaced the chain's longtime New York-based agency, Pedone & Partners, with six agencies that separately handle everything from public relations to the Internet. Lavely describes 2004 as "a benchmark year." Ruth's Chris spent an estimated \$6.8 million on marketing and advertising this year. Lavely expects that figure to increase by 20 percent next year.

The chain is also finally expanding after a restaurant-less 2004. This year, Miller opened company stores in Boston and Roseville, Calif., a Sacramento suburb. A third unit is scheduled to open in December in downtown Sacramento. Franchisees opened four units, including a second Ruth's Chris in Baltimore. Miller expects to open six to eight company units in '06 in New England, Florida and California. Franchisees are likely to open four. In

all the company expects to grow 10 percent in the next three to five years.

Miller is confident the units will do well as long as the company and franchisees find "A" sites in densely populated urban areas and affluent, high-traffic suburbs. Recent openings, he claims, are averaging \$5 million or better, considerably higher than the \$4.7 million AUV posted last year.

The new volumes still rank below competitors Smith & Wollensky (\$9.7 million) and The Capital Grille (\$7.2 million). That's no big deal when you consider Ruth's Chris 34.8 percent cash-on-cash return swamps all comers except

SNAPSHOT

COMPANY

Ruth's Chris Steak House

HEADQUARTERS

Heathrow, Fla.

UNITS

40 company restaurants, 51 franchises

2005 REVENUES

\$211.1 million

AVERAGE CHECK

\$63

EXPANSION PLANS

6 to 8 company, 5 to 7 franchise restaurants in '06

*Chain Leader estimate

President and CEO Craig Miller has paved the way for both expansion and profitability at Ruth's Chris Steak House by increasing unit sales, boosting margins and selectively marketing the chain's image.

Wine makes up 15 percent of cost of goods, Ruth's Chris' second largest expenditure (meat is the first). The company is currently revamping bar operations to boost the sales of wine and spirits.





An \$80 million line of revolving credit and free cash flow should help Ruth's Chris continue to open new restaurants.

Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar (37.1 percent). "This is a solidly profitable business," declares Minneapolis-based RBS Capital Markets analyst David Geraty, who rates the stock "outperform."

"Profit" is a word that Miller steps carefully around. The knock against his predecessor, former President and CEO Bill Hyde, is that Hyde fretted about the company's bottom line at the expense of growing sales and opening new units. "[Prior management] was more focused on maintaining the profitability of the business than on growth and franchising," Miller charges.

Customer traffic has helped account for seven consecutive quarters of double-digit same-store-sales gains.

Ruth's Chopped Salad is a modern take on the traditional: iceberg lettuce, spinach and radicchio tossed with red onions, mushrooms, green olives, bacon, eggs, hearts of palm, croutons, blue cheese and lemon-basil dressing, served with cherry tomatoes and topped with crispy fried onions.

Meat accounts for 51 percent of Ruth's Chris' cost of goods.

Debt Load

"I don't think that's a fair characterization," complains Hyde, who now works as a private investor in Dallas. "We were never focused on profitability."

The company, however, was saddled with significant debt after a recapitalization bought out late founder Ruth Fertel and brought in new owners Madison Dearborn. Hyde, Ruth's Chris' second largest shareholder, does admit that the \$130 million owed to lenders, combined with the economic slowdown after 9/11, restrained company growth.

Miller nonetheless has found ways to boost margins. He replaced common carri-

ers with a customized distribution system, for instance. "Distribution is saving us a half-point to a point in overall cost of sales, depending on the restaurant," Miller explains. "The buying power that goes along with distribution savings means we are able to negotiate national contracts on a lot of products." Meat accounts for 51 percent of Ruth's Chris' total cost of goods; wine follows at 15 percent.

Still, Miller insists the real leverage on the bottom line comes from raising sales volumes. "In approximately 18 months, we have added \$1 million per restaurant in sales. We've taken the system from \$4.2 million to \$5.2 million," he boasts. "The leverage that comes out of that increase in sales is very significant to the bottom line."

CIBC's Glass, in fact, estimates a 1 percent change in same-store sales will add or subtract 2 cents of earnings per share. Analysts who follow Ruth's Chris and report their findings to First Call predict the company will earn 73 cents per share in '05 and 86 cents in '06 based on strong same-store sales. Shares of RUTH are currently trading at 21 times earnings, somewhat below the 23.7 times analysts expected for '05, due likely to hurricane-related issues.

The company expects to open the damaged Metairie, La., restaurant this month while leaving shuttered the original Ruth's Chris on Broad Street in New Orleans and the Biloxi, Miss., restaurant (which never opened). The devastated New Orleans restaurant is likely to be razed, though no official is willing to say so. The brand new Biloxi unit, in the Hard Rock Hotel, however, will open next year.

Hurts So Bad

The reaction to management's quick decision to move company headquarters to Heathrow, Fla., after Hurricane Katrina has not been entirely positive. "I have not heard a single person defend the move," says





Times-Picayune restaurant critic Brett Anderson. "The city wasn't done flooding yet and they were gone." A columnist for the same newspaper, Lolis Eric Elie, recently quoted Fertel's son, Randy, as saying, "I don't think leaving would have crossed her mind."

Miller is sensitive to criticism that he abandoned the founder's hometown without much thought to her legacy. Fertel, a single mom, remortgaged her house to buy Chris Steakhouse, a New Orleans institution, in 1964. A savvy businesswoman, she got a jump on competition by franchising, a risky move that worked despite the complexity of a fine-dining restaurant. Ironically, one of her earliest franchisees was Paul Fleming, who founded Fleming's Prime Steak House. He later sold the rival chain to Outback.

"You'd like to be able to take more time," Miller allows, adding the decision to relocate headquarters was sobering. "I learned that in a crisis, the absence of someone with an answer can be the most hurtful and harmful thing. Everyone is looking at you."

Including, apparently, the Street. "Uncertainty in a market is unsettling for investors," Miller says. The market may still be worried given the beating the stock has taken since the September storms. Miller, however, remains hopeful. "The clouds will dissipate and the sun will come out. Nothing about our story, nothing about our fundamentals, has changed," he says.

Let Them Eat Steak

Part of that story concerns Ruth's Chris' customers, who Miller believes will still be willing to fork out an average \$63 a meal despite rising energy prices. He's counting on baby boomers, with their increasing disposable income and desire for luxury goods, to help him maintain market share. "Demographically, we're aligned with what consumers are looking for," he says.

So positioned, Ruth's Chris, the largest

player in the luxury steak subset, may currently have the upper hand in the \$12.5 billion steak category. "People think, all of a sudden, there's a lot of competition among the high-end steakhouses. If you add them up, I think the number is less than 400," he says.

Considerably less, in fact. Technomic reports nine national chains with per-person check averages greater than \$50 operated just 273 units at the end of 2004. Experts do not expect that number to climb much higher by the end of '05 as many companies prefer wringing sales from existing restaurants to adding new ones. Only Fleming's and Capital Grille saw double-digit annual growth in '04, on a much smaller unit base than Ruth's Chris.

"What the IPO allowed us to do is significantly capitalize the company to fulfill our growth objectives," Miller says. The proceeds from the offering relieved debt pressure, which had hampered company store expansion. Miller figures Ruth's Chris still owes about \$38 million, a relatively minor sum in the scheme of things. An \$80 million line of revolving credit and free cash flow (the company will generate \$35 million in EBITDA in '05) will be more than enough to fund new restaurants and projects like bar renovation and the yet-tolaunch "Friends of Ruth" VIP program.

Miller envisions the program, largely administered online, catering to local movers and shakers. The details, particularly as they concern privacy issues, have yet to be worked out. But Miller thinks offering a higher level of service to these folks, whether or not they currently use the restaurants, will entice them to the restaurant more often. "I would love to be in a position where a Friend of Ruth drives up outside and our valet is able to recognize him," he muses.

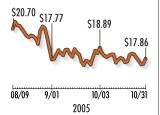
Here's another thought: How about serving him lunch?

At Ruth's Chris, the largest upscale steakhouse chain, a guest-focused culture is a big draw for affluent families and expense-account diners.

Seafood dishes such as Ahi-Tuna Stack make up 12.1 percent of sales, while meat dishes make up 43 percent.

Taking Stock

Ruth's Chris Steak House stock opened at its IPO at \$19.90, well above the predicted \$15 to \$17. Still weathering the effect of hurricanes along the Gulf Coast and in Florida, RUTH stock was trading at around \$17.80 at press time.



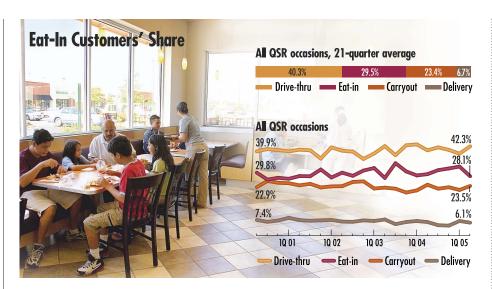
Ruth's Chris **Beefs Up Profits**

Revenue (in millions)





Source: company reports: *Chain Leader estimate



In-Store Special

Eat-in QSR customers have more sides and drinks and spend more money.

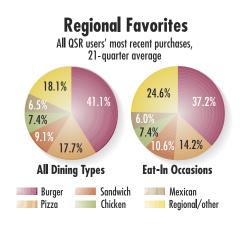
BY MARY BOLTZ CHAPMAN

ast-food customers who eat in the restaurant spend more on average than those who don't. According to Quick-Track, a quarterly survey by San Clemente, Calif.-based research firm Sandelman & Associates, the average perperson check for those who ate in the unit on their last occasion was \$4.96, vs. \$4.65 for all QSR users, a 21-quarter average shows.

- Eat-in customers were more apt than all QSR users to order drinks and sides with their meals. 96.3 percent of those who ate in on their last visit had a beverage vs. 77.3 percent of all fast-food users. 67.9 percent of dine-in guests bought at least one side vs. 57.8 percent of all users.
- Those eating in on their last occasion were less likely to use a special

promotion: 15.8 percent vs. 22.1 percent of all users. 39.1 percent of eat-in customers taking advantage of such a deal learned about it from signs in the restaurant.

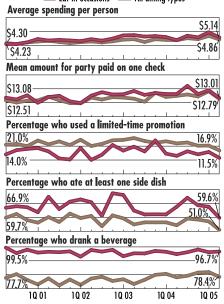
- A 21-quarter average finds that eat-in comprises 29.5 percent of all QSR occasions. Drive-thru makes up 40.3 percent; carryout, 23.4 percent; and delivery, 6.7 percent.
- While 40.0 percent of all users had lunch on their last occasion, 54.4 percent of those eating in the restaurant on their last visit had lunch. 49.5 percent of all users had dinner; 36.9 percent of eat-in customers had dinner.
- According to a 21-quarter average, 22.1 percent of QSR customers dining in the unit on their last occasion were with friends. And 21.0 percent were alone. Conversely, 17.3 percent of all fast-food users ate with friends on their last occasion, and 26.9 percent dined alone.
- 28.0 percent of those eating in the restaurant on their most recent occasion had a hamburger; 24.7 percent of all users did on their last occasion.



Dining In and Spending More

All QSR users' most recent occasions

Eat-in occasions — All dining types



Methodology

Customer trend data is based on the quarterly Quick-Track survey by Sandelman & Associates, a San Clemente, Calif.-based research firm. Quick-Track queries a nationally representative sample of 600 fast-food customers on a host of demographic and usage questions. The firm defines "QSR eat-in users" as those who have purchased meals for eat-in from a QSR chain at least once in the past month. Most-recent purchase data is based on all QSR users whose dining type was eat-in on their last purchase occasion.

Franchise Developer

Lending Alliances: Five Options for Franchise Funding

ulti-branding is hot. According to some leading franchisors, it may be the key to the future of the quick-service restaurant industry. The good news is that finding financing typically is easier the second-or third-time around.

Here are some strategies to consider:

1. Sale/leasebacks. Franchisees who own business real estate can put it to work as a capital source by selling the real estate to a financing company, then leasing it back. You essentially profit from the sale but retain operating control. "If you go into default, you may lose the store but you won't lose your house," says Brad Saltz, director of restaurant services for Cleveland, Ohio-based SS&G Financial Services, Inc.

- 2. Franchisors. Franchisors such as McDonald's link franchisees to "relationship" banks offering competitive financing packages. They also may offer guarantees to make the numbers work. Among the options, says Mark Siebert, chief executive officer, The iFranchise Group, Homewood, Ill.: a financial guarantee of up to 10% of the loan portfolio; a guarantee cushioned by a take-back provision; or a guarantee that includes a remarket agreement for a given number of units.
- **3. Partnerships.** "It's better to do it on your own. But if you can't, look for 10 investors with \$50,000 rather than one 'angel' investor," advises Saltz. The key: finding partners with aligned interests and, if possible, complementary contributions such as operations skills or access to a development pipeline.



- **4. Venture capital/funds.** Generally, venture capital is interested only in large portfolios. However, *Franchise-Consultation.com* reports financial brokers are approaching franchisors to put together large pools of money using Small Business Administration (SBA) and private funds.
- **5. Traditional sources.** The SBA has two basic loan programs, says spokesperson Mike Stamler: a guaranteed loan that provides for a partial guarantee on bank loans up to \$2 million and a certified development company loan. If you want a longer term

and can pay a higher rate, Saltz advises going to a national bank. Local banks are more likely to lower the interest rate as a balance to a shorter term.



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Eagle Group *p. 9.* A line of handwashing sinks with anti-microbial protection. Call **(800) 441-8440** or visit the Web site at **www.eaglegrp.com/handsinks.html**.

Hatco Corp. *p.* 24-25. A variety of food-service equipment. Call **(800) 558-0607** or visit **www.hatcocorp.com**.

Hobart Corp. *p.* 67, 69. A full line of commercial foodservice equipment. Visit the Web site at **www.hobartcorp.com**.

Star Manufacturing Intl. Inc. *p.* 7. Ovens, griddles and more. Call **(800) 264-7827** or visit **www.star-mfg.com**.

SUPPLIES/SERVICES

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Saniguard/Component Hardware Group Inc. *p. 3.* Inorganic, anti-microbial plumbing

and hardware. Call (877) SANIGUARD or visit www.saniguard-online.com.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security *p.* 63. For free checklists, templates and other resources to plan for emergencies, visit **www.ready.gov**.

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EDUCATION/EVENTS

How to Grow to 100 Units *p.* 29. Chain Leader presents tools and best practices for growing concepts. Visit the Web site at **www.foodservice411.com/clmag**.

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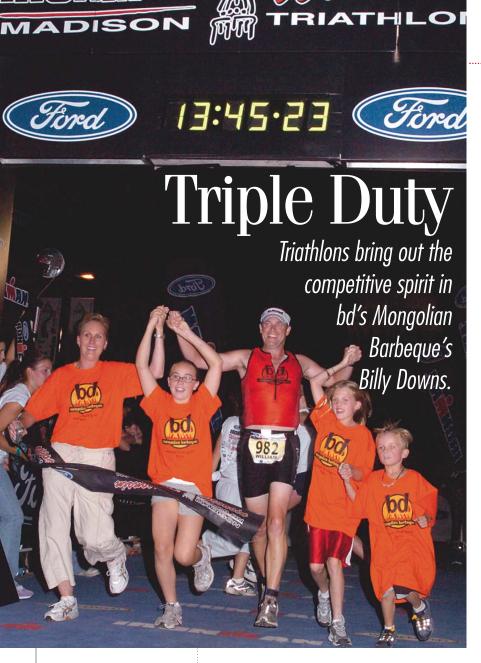


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In September, Downs finished 811th out of 2,076 competitors in his first Ironman triathlon, crossing the finish line with his wife, Amy, and their three kids.



BY CHARLES BERNSTEIN

illy Downs, president, CEO and owner of 28-unit, Ferndale, Mich.-based bd's Mongolian Barbeque, started competing in triathlons in 2001 at the urging of Matthew Kirby, a partner of Downs', and Wayne Wright, a franchise service manager.

"I had never done anything like this since I launched the company in 1992," Downs says. "I rarely exercised and spent more time just working. But Kirby and Wright encouraged me to try a triathlon, and one is all that it took to hook me."

From 2001 to 2004, Downs dabbled with triathlons and began to discuss competing in Ironman events. An Ironman triathlon is no easy task: It consists of a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and 26.2-mile marathon.

Start to Finish

In 2004, Downs took advantage of a unique opportunity to sponsor and train with an elite team of 12 athletes in the Detroit area. "Thus I could prepare for my own Ironman," he declares.

From February to September of 2005, Downs trained for his first Ironman. Three or four times a week, he swam a mile and a half, ran 6 to 10 miles or biked for five hours a day. He also incorporated yoga and weight training into his regimen.

On Sept. 11, Downs competed in an Ironman triathlon in Madison, Wis., with temperatures soaring in the mid-90s. The 39-year-old finished 811th out of 2,076 competitors and completed the endurance test in 13 hours and 18 minutes.

More importantly, Downs was able to share his triumph with his wife, Amy, and their three children, Amanda, 12; Abigail, 9; and Brendan, 5. "Although I love my lifestyle, the defining moment for me this year was crossing that finish line with my family," he says.

If at First You Don't Succeed...

Downs' finish was not quite good enough for him to qualify for the Ironman world championship in Kona, Hawaii. But he is not losing sight of his goals. He is tuning up for a marathon in January in Phoenix and is set to compete in a crucial Ironman battle July 23, 2006, in Lake Placid, N.Y. His goal in Lake Placid is to finish in the top 3 percent of his age group, ensuring him a trip to the world championships.

When he's not training for a triathlon or marathon, Downs is out of bed by 4:30 a.m., the first one in line at Starbucks, and off for a 6- to 9-mile run three days a week. As the season progresses, he goes for two or three workouts a day.

Although his athletic pursuits take up a lot of his time, Downs doesn't let it interfere with other parts of his life. "Everything needs to be in balance, and you must have your priorities straight," he asserts. "I schedule my family time first, work second and fitness third."



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