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INSIGHT FOR RESTAURANT EXECUTIVES

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Rock Bottom returns to
its Prairie-style roots.

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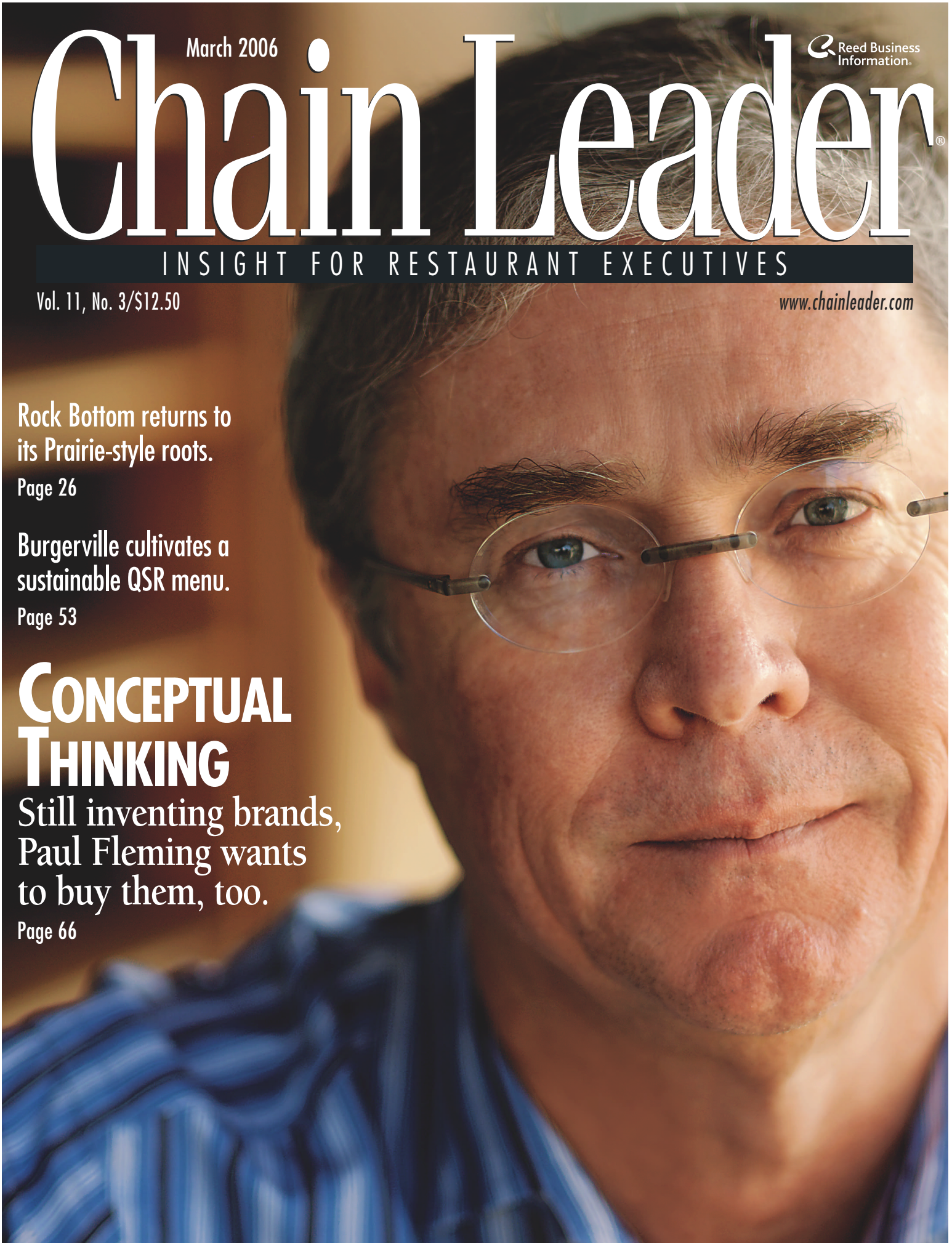
Burgerville cultivates a
sustainable QSR menu.

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CONCEPTUAL THINKING

Still inventing brands,
Paul Fleming wants
to buy them, too.

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Top-Rated Chains Overall

Percent of QSR users naming "excellent" for overall rating of last occasion

In-N-Out Burger	57%
Panera Bread	56%
Idaho Pizza Company	55%
Chick-fil-A	54%
St. Louis Bread Co.	54%
Chicago Connection Pizza	52%
Chipotle Mexican Grill	51%
Pat & Oscar's	51%
Chico's Tacos	51%
Imo's Pizza	51%

Source: Sandelman & Associates



BENCHMARKING

Fast-Food Customers Say In-N-Out Is No. 1

Fast-food fans are still crazy about In-N-Out Burger. In 2005, the quarterly Quick-Track survey by San Clemente, Calif.-based Sandelman & Associates questioned 62,751 QSR users about fast-food chains they visited in the past three months.

In-N-Out Burger received the highest overall rating, with 57 percent of its customers rating it "excellent," or a five on a five-point scale, on their last visit. For the past two years, the Irvine, Calif.-based drive-thru chain has shared the top position with Richmond Heights, Mo.-based Panera Bread. In 2005, 56 percent of customers ranked Panera as "excellent." Both chains' data are lower than in 2004, when each received "excellent" ratings from 59 percent of users.

Interestingly, the research also found

that a growing percentage of fast-food customers wants to see healthful food and variety on the menu, neither of which is found at In-N-Out. In 2005, 43 percent rated "availability of healthy/nutritious food" as "extremely important." In 2001, that figure was 35 percent. Similarly, 36 percent of QSR users said "variety of menu items" is "extremely important," vs. 32 percent in 2001.

In-N-Out also scored the best in taste of food, quality of ingredients, temperature of food, friendliness and courtesy, and accuracy in filling orders.

Fast-food users named the factors important to them in choosing a QSR. The top three are cleanliness of the restaurant (77 percent rated it "extremely important"), taste of the food (73 percent) and order accuracy (66 percent). **CL**

Industry Calendar

MARCH 5-7

International Restaurant & Foodservice Show of New York

Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, New York

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Contact: (203) 840-5911; www.internationalrestaurantny.com

MARCH 9-12

Research Chefs Association Annual Conference & Tradeshow

Hilton Americas, Houston

Educational and professional conference that focuses on the discipline of culinology, the blending of culinary arts and the science of food.

Contact: (404) 252-3663; www.culinology.org

MARCH 22-24

Food Safety Summit

Mandalay Bay Convention Center, Las Vegas

An expo and conference about food safety, quality assurance and food security for manufacturers, processors and operators.

Contact: (847) 405-4000; www.foodsafetysummit.com

APRIL 2-5

Women's Foodservice Forum Annual Leadership Development Conference

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Contact: (866) 368-8008; www.womensfoodserviceforum.com

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STORYBOARD

22 Big Fish Story

Three-unit Hapa Sushi has turned to unconventional marketing to get its name out among consumers and prospective franchisees. The Boulder, Colo.-based chain launched an irreverent ad campaign that features teenage boys using fast-food burgers instead of dog waste for neighborhood pranks. And to capture the attention of potential franchisees, founder and President Mark Van Grack sent them a live Japanese carp, a water-filled tank and Japanese bamboo.

By Margaret Littman



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RESTAURATOUR

26 The Wright Stuff

Rock Bottom Restaurant & Brewery has returned to its Prairie-style roots with a new prototype that is smaller and more expensive than its current pub look. The new design highlights the chain's brewing equipment while incorporating Frank Lloyd Wright-style furnishings, people photos and natural elements like flagstone and wood. The Colorado Springs, Colo.-based company expects the prototype store to generate \$4.5 million in sales a year.

By Lisa Bertagnoli



76

TOQUE OF THE TOWN

53 Natural Resources

Tara Wefers is infusing Burgerville's QSR menu with fresh, local, sustainable ingredients. The core menu features burgers with additive- and hormone-free, grass-fed beef; fish and chips with mercury-free halibut; and smoked blue cheese in salads. Highly successful seasonal items include Walla Walla sweet onion rings in the summer and a chocolate-hazelnut shake in the winter. Food and labor costs have risen less than 1 percent since going full bore with the program.

By Monica Rogers

THOUGHT LEADER

66 Conceptual Thinking

Paul Fleming, the idea man behind Fleming's Prime Steakhouse and P.F. Chang's is still creating concepts, preparing to debut two eateries this year. But the renowned concept creator is now also interested in buying restaurants with sales of less than \$10 million, a niche he says is all but ignored by private-equity firms. *Chain Leader* spoke with Fleming about the process of creating new brands, the role he plays in his existing concepts and joint ventures with Outback Steakhouse.

By David Farkas



LIQUID MEASURE

63 Under the Influence

Houlihan's switched to a third-party provider for its alcohol-service training from its outdated in-house program in August. Designed to train all front-of-the-house staff to serve alcohol responsibly, Houlihan's new program covers alcohol law, recognizing and preventing intoxication, checking IDs and handling situations with guests. Since rolling the program systemwide, the chain has had no legal claims filed against it.

By Maya Norris

FOOD SAFETY

76 Train the Trainers

The Melting Pot has a unique challenge: It serves raw food. The Tampa, Fla.-based fondue chain depends on servers to coach customers on how long to cook the meats and vegetables in hot pots of oil or broth. It has created a strong culture and training program where food safety is addressed in both front- and back-of-the-house training, preshift meetings, and regional and annual conferences.

By Mary Boltz Chapman

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ON THE NET

How to Grow to 100 Units

- Our new online series, created to help young chains reach the next level.
- Ask the Experts: How often should regional managers visit units?
- Coverage of *Chain Leader's* "How to Grow to 100 Units" roundtable, including video highlights.
- An expanded editorial archive of stories on growing concepts.
- Weekly blog from upstart Pam Felix, California Tortilla

Plus

- Paul Fleming talks about working with venture-capital partners.
- Senior Editor David Farkas muses about the restaurant industry in his blog, Dave's Dispatch.
- Daily news.
- Archived stories from the pages of *Chain Leader*.

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Share and Share Alike

I recently participated in judging the International Foodservice Manufacturers Association's Silver Plate Awards. It's an interesting and thorough process: Foodservice operators in nine segments are nominated based on their menu innovation, human-resources practices, operations and results, and industry leadership. The panel of judges is comprised of the previous year's winners and trade-press editors. After narrowing the field to the top operators in each segment, we gather to discuss the entries and advocate for our favorites, then elect a winner.



Other segments of foodservice could teach chains a lot about support.

MARY BOLTZ CHAPMAN,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

(630) 288-8250
mchapman@reedbusiness.com

Leading Institutions

Because my knowledge of some of the categories is limited, I depend on this forum to teach me about the nominees beyond what's on the entry forms so I can make an educated decision. I'm particularly interested in the opinion of last year's winner in a given segment.

What I find interesting about those in the non-commercial segments like

health care and colleges is how often the judges from those segments know the nominees well and have toured their operations. When someone has a great retail program that is building incremental sales in, say, one of their dormitories, they share how they did it with other university foodservice operators. If a hospital foodservice director is serving meals room-service-style within 40 minutes of a patient's ordering it, other health-care operators are usually welcome to observe the system.

Chains can learn from that.

Share the Wealth

No, I don't think you should invite all your competitors in the next time you roll out a better way to expedite takeout orders. The noncommercial operators are not generally competing directly against one another, whereas chains certainly are.

But there are ways to share experience

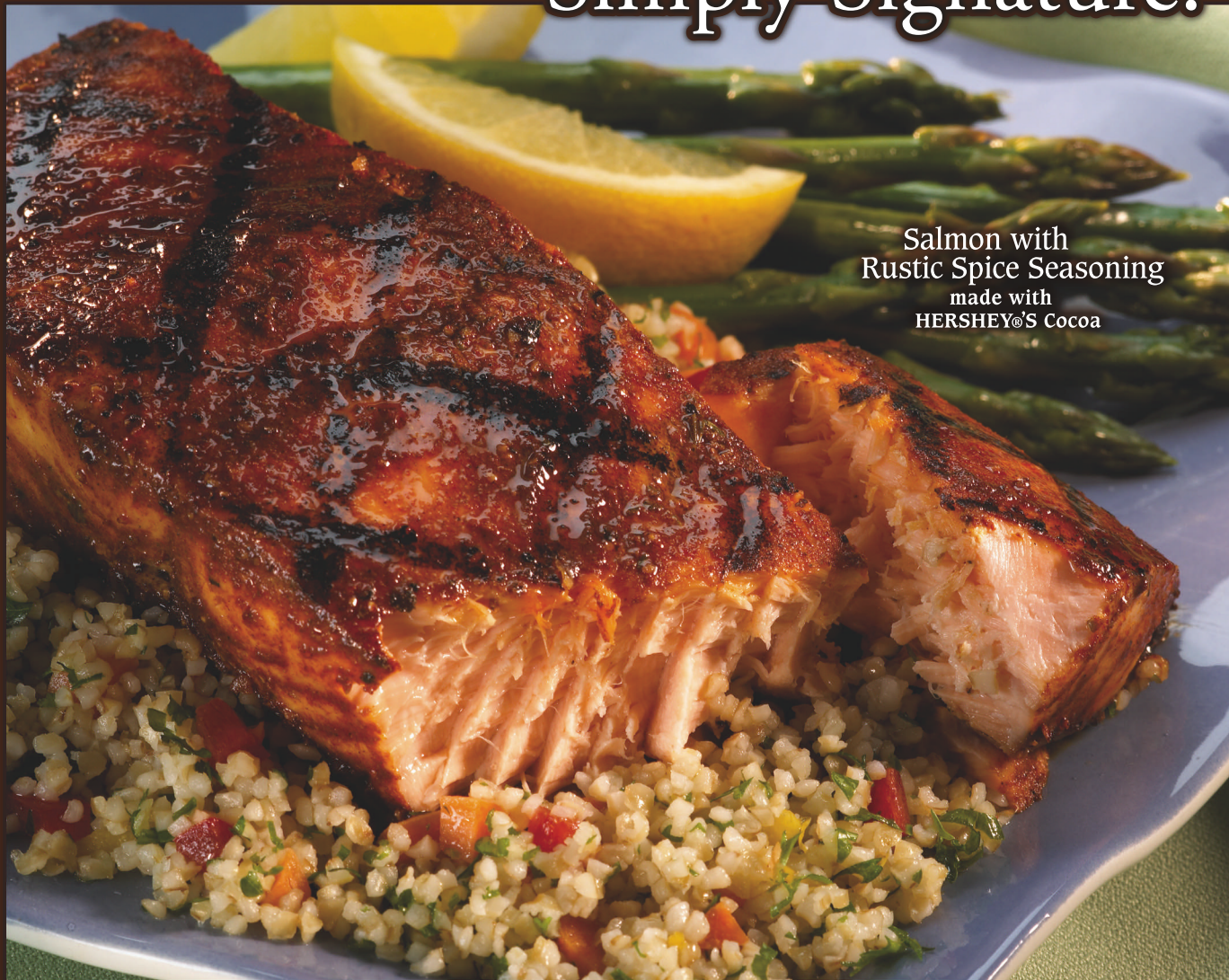
with each another for the benefit of the industry in general. A good example of that is diversity. Many chains support organizations like the Women's Foodservice Forum and MultiCultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance. Those who do know that there's a competitive advantage to hiring and promoting women and minorities throughout the company. They could keep the methods they've used to ensure inclusion to themselves. But most of those progressive companies are happy to share their success because it benefits the whole industry.

Another example is food safety. I have never spoken to a restaurant executive in charge of quality and food safety who wasn't a strong advocate. On the other hand, I have come across media machines within chains who wouldn't allow access to their food-safety people. If there ever was a topic that should never be suppressed due to "competitive issues," this is it. Would they claim, "My restaurant is safer than yours"?

Our industry offers many outlets to share ideas and best practices. We have a wide range of industry magazines, all of which fill their pages with operators' successful ideas. There are dozens of gatherings, from the wide-ranging to the tightly focused, both formal and informal. A growing number of Web-based forums let operators pick each other's brains online.

If you're not taking advantage of learning all you can from other chain operators and sharing your own knowledge, you're missing a lot of opportunity. And you may never be discussed at the Silver Plate judging. **CL**

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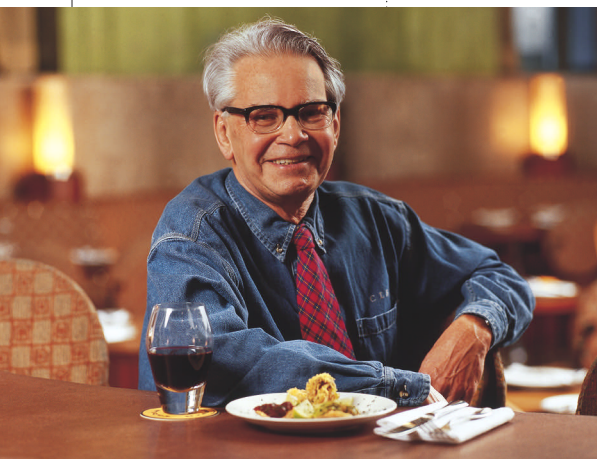
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Proceed with Caution

Once again, initial public offerings are on the rise in the restaurant industry. But there is no guarantee that going public will produce the sharp gains restaurant chains are looking for. And the influx of capital an IPO raises can actually hurt, creating unrealistic expectations about growth. Remember what happened to Boston Chicken? The chain used the money from its 1993 IPO to grow, but the company expanded too fast and ended up in bankruptcy by 1998. McDonald's bought the chain, now called Boston Market, in 2000.



With IPO activity coming to the fore, I wonder if it will pay off.

**CHARLES BERNSTEIN,
EDITOR-AT-LARGE**

(732) 263-0581
Charles_Bernstein@msn.com

Off and Running

Another McDonald's subsidiary, however, is off to a good start with its IPO. On its first day of trading on Jan. 27, Chipotle Mexican Grill shares closed at \$44, double its initial offering price of \$22. Chipotle and McDonald's sold 7.9 million shares, raising \$173 million. McDonald's still owns a 69 percent stake in the fast-casual Mexican chain,

which has 490 units and about \$600 million in systemwide sales.

Chipotle executives plan to use the proceeds to pay down its \$30 million credit line to McDonald's and open 80 to 90 restaurants annually.

But can Chipotle handle such rapid growth without administrative support from McDonald's? With Chipotle founder, President and CEO Steve Ells at the helm, I would say a resounding yes.

Riding the IPO Wave

Other restaurant companies are also jumping into the IPO fray. Morton's Restaurant Group's IPO on Feb. 8, just three years after the company went private, garnered \$161 million for the chain, on an opening price of \$17. Owner Castle Harlan retained about 31

percent of the 69-unit steakhouse chain.

Meanwhile, Wendy's Tim Horton's is on track for an IPO in March. The initial offering is expected to raise between \$81.7 million and slightly over \$100 million for the \$2.1 billion, 2,700-unit doughnut chain. Wendy's announced in February that it would likely spin off Tim Horton's nine to 18 months after the IPO.

And Burger King Chairman and CEO Greg Brenneman is finally set for an initial public offering in late February or early March. "Our goal has always been to take Burger King public," Brenneman said in a written statement. "We believe the transparency and ownership stability of a public company will benefit our employees and franchisees for years to come."

Beware the Bandwagon

The rising number of restaurant companies that are planning to enter the public market is no surprise. When one company does well in a certain sector, others tend to follow, hoping for the same success. I'm sure that many restaurant companies have the balance sheets and potential to succeed on Wall Street. But for others, hopping on the bandwagon will not pay off, at least not in the long term.

The companies that have the best chance at making it will be the ones that are careful, disciplined and don't open too many units too fast. **CB**



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PHONE: (800) 290-5460, ext. 168 E-MAIL: chainleader@reprintbuyer.com

PUBLISHER: Ray Herrmann

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Mary Boltz Chapman

MANAGING EDITOR: Maya Norris

SENIOR EDITOR: David Farkas

SENIOR ART DIRECTOR: Ala Ennes

PRODUCTION ARTIST: Krystina S. Kliman

EDITOR-AT-LARGE: Charles Bernstein

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:

Lisa Bertagnoli, Margaret Littman, Monica Rogers

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER: Tad Smith

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER: John Poulin

PRESIDENT, CHICAGO DIVISION: Jeff Greisch

GROUP PUBLISHER, FOODSERVICE GROUP: Gerald J. White

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR, FOODSERVICE GROUP: Patricia B. Dailey

NATIONAL SALES MANAGER: Craig M. Coale

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INDIANA/MICHIGAN/OKLAHOMA/TEXAS INSIDE SALES/CLASSIFIED
 Craig M. Coale (630) 288-8207 Jim McMurray (630) 288-8467

PUBLISHING SUPPORT: Linda Wojak (630) 288-8201

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, EVENTS

AND CUSTOM COMMUNICATIONS:

MANAGING EDITOR, CUSTOM PUBLICATIONS:

CIRCULATION MANAGER: Kati Tucker

PRODUCTION MANAGER: Joyce Simon

CUSTOMER CONTRACT COORDINATOR: Joanne Westphal

RESEARCH DIRECTOR: Peter Cholewinski

INTERIM DIRECTOR, ELECTRONIC MEDIA: Kim Kishbaugh

WEBSITE MANAGER: Gregory Sokolowski

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BY DAVID FARKAS

Franchise Player

With almost \$41 million invested exclusively in franchisors and franchisees, New York-based United Enterprise Fund controls nearly 1,700 restaurants; many of them are minority-owned and in urban markets. UEF's current roster includes Bear Rock Cafe, Le Petit Bistro, Maui Tacos, Popeyes Chicken & Biscuits and Church's Chicken. Managing Partner Dan Dean, a former PepsiCo foodservice executive, recently shed light on the firm's investment strategy.

What are success drivers in a franchise-oriented company?

There are many, but one of the most significant is whether the franchisor is focused on franchisee profitability or just perceived brand-building.

The difference being?

Some franchisors have marketing departments run by sophisticated people who want to do a lot of promotions for the purpose of brand-building without assuring that branding-building also builds sales in the short term. That forces franchisees to commit resources to advertising and promotional initiatives that may have no tangible ROI for them.

Are there inherent risks to investing in urban-centered franchises?

Urban markets have higher sales and more transactions. On the negative side, they have higher security, lighting and labor costs, indirectly in the form of turnover. Urban markets aren't as saturated because there's less available, viable real estate.

Your firm wants its portfolio companies to use profit-based incentives. Why?

It's important both at the store level and corporate level because it gives everyone a sense of ownership. A lot of companies

offer bonuses based on cash-flow targets. They might say that stock doesn't mean anything to store-level managers. We disagree. Giving people a sense of ownership impacts productivity and profits.

What concerns do you have about the balance sheets of emerging chains?

If your approach is "if we build it, they will come," you will be faced with liquidity issues. But if you have done your job properly, you will emerge from that issue like Bear Rock Cafe and Le Petit Bistro.

The other issue is lack of debt financing. Lenders want to see longevity, a certain number of restaurant units and consistent sales performance around the mean. These can be challenging for emerging chains.

Finally, because most young chains don't have robust balance sheets, even if you are a great concept, it's tough to compete for a great site. Developers may think you're the best but often go with a national brand with a great balance sheet because they care about certainty of payment.

What's your view of current restaurant valuations?

Our view of franchise packages is 4.0 times to 6.25 times [EBITDA] depending if real estate and deferred capital-expenditure requirements are part of the deal. Yet it is really hard to judge valuations because each deal takes into account factors like unit portability, brand extendibility, pipeline and real estate.

Finally, is it possible to balance your role on various boards as both investor and management adviser?

Board membership is complicated for an investor because it can put the investor in a position where he or she has a contractual relationship and a fiduciary responsibility at the same time. Balancing those two can be a delicate process. **CL**





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Skewed Perspective

Asqew Grill takes a stab at markets outside San Francisco with its signature skewers. **BY MAYA NORRIS**

Consulting chef Eric Reese, a former culinary instructor at Le Cordon Bleu, developed Asqew Grill's skewers, which come with customers' choice of salad or starch such as roasted-garlic mashed potatoes and mascarpone polenta.

Asqew Grill's comfortable, rustic decor features a rich red and golden palette, rosewood chairs and tables, exposed beams, photos hung at an angle, and a galvanized menu board.

SNAPSHOT

CONCEPT

Asqew Grill

HEADQUARTERS

San Francisco

UNITS

4

2005

SYSTEMWIDE SALES

\$4.75 million

2006

SYSTEMWIDE SALES

\$6.1 million

(company estimate)

AVERAGE

UNIT VOLUME

\$1.3 million

AVERAGE CHECK

\$10.50

EXPANSION PLANS

2 company stores in 2006, 2 in 2007

David Gogolak, Mark Nicandri and Robert Price always talked about going into business together when they attended Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration in the mid-'90s. But when they graduated, they went their separate ways. Gogolak ended up working as a dining-room manager at Scala's Bistro, an Italian restaurant in San Francisco. Nicandri eventually became head kitchen manager for a unit of the Pappadeaux Seafood Kitchen chain in Atlanta. And Price settled in Washington, D.C., as the assistant manager for the Willard Inter-Continental Hotel.

But in 1998, the friends reunited when Gogolak came up with an idea for a fast-casual skewer concept. It came to him when he and then-Executive Sous Chef Eric Reese cooked dinner for the employees at Scala's. "They put a bunch of stuff on skewers and paired it with different vegetables and different meats and grilled it off and served it over some salads. Some of them were on pastas. Some of them were on rice. And the staff loved it and was really impressed with it," Nicandri recalls. "When [Gogolak] was driving home, he thought, 'You know, that might not be a bad idea for a restaurant.'"

Mix and Match

The partners opened Asqew Grill in San Francisco in 1999, offering chicken, meat and seafood on skewers prepared on a grill. The skewers include the best-selling Texas BBQ Chicken, \$5.95 half, \$8.95 regular, with red onions and corn on the cob; Thai Beef, \$6.50 half, \$9.50 regular, with crimini mushrooms, zucchini and red peppers; and Peppercorn Encrusted Ahi, \$6.50 half, \$9.50 regular, with broccoli, red peppers

and red onions. The skewers rest on top of the customers' choice of starch or salad. Starches include mascarpone polenta and cilantro jasmine rice. The eight salads range from the traditional Caesar to the Basil and Baby Arugula, with mixed greens, toasted almonds and fennel tossed in Orange Champagne Vinaigrette.

Asqew was an instant hit. In its first 12 months of operation, the company posted \$775,000 in sales, exceeding its projection of \$600,000. "I vividly remember having to close the doors a couple of times the first two weeks we were open because we ran out of food," Nicandri says.

Asqew has since opened three more units in San Francisco and posted \$4.75 million in sales in 2005.

Full Tilt

Asqew is now preparing to grow beyond the Bay Area. It is finalizing its franchising program, catering more off-premise events like street fairs to build brand awareness, upgrading its POS system and working with consultant David Weiss, an original partner and current shareholder in Pasta Pomodoro, to help expand the chain.

Over the next two years, Asqew plans to open one company unit in San Francisco and three in the suburbs. It expects to enter markets including Southern California, Washington, D.C., Seattle and Chicago via franchising over the next few years, but it is approaching franchise expansion cautiously.

"We don't have a target like we have to have 100 [restaurants] open by '09. It's really all about partnering with the right people," Nicandri says. "If the right person or right group comes along that seems to fit with what we're looking for, we'll move ahead with them." **CI**

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HOW TO
GROW
TO **100**
UNITS

Should You Franchise?

You have a great concept with a lot of potential.

But franchising isn't right for everyone. **BY MARY BOLTZ CHAPMAN**

For restaurant concepts that are eager to start national expansion, franchising might look like an easy and fast way to get a little cash, share some risk and open a lot of units. But like many "overnight successes," a lot of work and experience must come first. Some concepts and operators just aren't ready for franchising. And some may never be.

Personality Plus

A look in the mirror is a good place to start to determine if franchising is for you. If you're very entrepreneurial, the type of person who makes decisions from the hip, or not willing to listen to other people's ideas, it's probably not. Franchisees appreciate structure and stability, and they expect to have input on the strategic direction of the concept.

Also examine your own personal goals. If you look forward to a comfortable life with your family, you might decide to prepare your concept for sale instead. Very aggressive and competitive people might find fast expansion appealing.

Recruiting and supporting franchisees is a different job than running restaurants, and it requires a different set of skills such as sales, administration and leadership. Do you have those skills? Does someone else in your organization? It also takes a lot of time; you'll need to determine if you have the hours and resources to allocate to something beyond your core business.

Package Deal

Evaluate the concept and the systems it has in place. If you have a good, solid brand that's clearly differentiated from its competitors and has a long-term supply of potential customers and employees, you have a good start.

Store economics must be tight and con-

sistent from store to store. You should be able to predict the cost of building, opening and running a unit. Franchisees will want to make profits after they pay royalties and their own "salary." You'll have to demonstrate that the concept works in different markets and types of locations. That means at least a few years of experience under your belt.

Everything that happens in a restaurant has to be reproducible and trainable. If operating the unit requires skills you can't teach in a few weeks, it's probably not going to succeed.

Even if you're sure your concept can compete for customers, it might not stand up against other franchises—restaurants or not. Check out what similar companies are charging for franchise fees, but balance that with the expenses of recruiting and supporting franchisees.

Have You Got Their Back?

Your company has to have the systems and support in place to help franchisees with everything from hiring and real estate to marketing and communications. The more sophisticated and advanced those systems are, the more sophisticated a franchisee you'll attract.

Such systems need to be ready prior to franchising, which requires investments in infrastructure like administrative support, training and menu development.

Like so many questions, "should you franchise" is not easy to answer. If you honestly examine your company and yourself, you'll be better able to answer it. **CL**

"How to Grow to 100 Units" has an online component, featuring Web-only exclusives, a blog from an upstart operator, applicable stories from *Chain Leader* and more, at www.chainleader.com.

*It's surprising how much noise it takes
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*Or at least how much
it used to take.*



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BIG FISH STORY

Hapa Sushi surprises both customers and prospective franchisees with its unconventional marketing.

M

ark Van Grack is not one for convention. The founder and president of Boulder, Colo.-based Hapa Sushi Grill/Sake Bar is not daunted by the looks he gets when he talks about his plans to turn his three-unit company into a national sushi chain, not to mention a kid-friendly one with PBJ rolls on the menu, highchairs and chopsticks held together with rubber bands. Nor is he daunted by running TV advertising with an annual ad budget of just \$100,000, about 2 percent of systemwide sales. He's also confident that his nascent chain can draw the attention of prospective franchisees who are bombarded by offers from more established names.

Van Grack's lack of fear led him to develop an irreverent, aggressive ad campaign that positions Hapa Sushi in a humorous light. In addition to print ads in the satirical newspaper *The Onion*, with images such as skinny sumo wrestlers, Hapa launched the "Bag of Burgers" TV ad in 2005, featuring teenage boys using fast-food burgers instead of dog waste for neighborhood pranks. It aired on cable in Boulder and Denver, where the restaurants are located, and will air again there as well as in new markets where Hapa Sushi stores open.

Because the concept is young, Van Grack is not looking for sales increases directly attributable to the ads. "You're speaking to someone who has a hard time measuring. It is hard to judge the value of those ad dollars," he says. "Our customers will tell us, 'I saw that ad, it was great.' We are assuming those who are not our customer who see it will respond and come try us."

BY MARGARET
LITTMAN

"Bag of Burgers"

Length: 30 seconds



1. Drive-Thru Cashier:
May I help you?
Boy: One hamburger.
Drive-Thru Cashier: Do
you want fries with that?



3.



5.

EAT HEALTHY

7. Tagline: Eat healthy.



2. Boy: No, thanks.
Drive-Thru Cashier:
Next window, please.



4.



6.



8. Hapa Sushi.

Jonathan Schoenberg, creative director and partner for Boulder-based TDA Advertising and Design, the agency that created Hapa's campaigns, says anecdotal feedback for the TV spot has been positive. "No burger joint is going to complain about it," he says.

The Old College Try

Founded in 1999, Hapa is now a \$5 million brand. All three restaurants are company-owned, but going forward Hapa Sushi will franchise, including one in Madison, Wis., and another in Washington, D.C., where Van Grack grew up, slated to open in the fall. College towns like Boulder, Madison and Austin, Texas, are part of the company's expansion plan, which calls for 100 new units in the next three years.

"Those places have similar mindsets from a culinary standpoint as Boulder," Schoenberg says. "People there care about what they eat."


Average check and unit volumes vary with the two Hapa Sushi prototypes: The 1,500-square-foot restaurant near campuses typically grosses \$750,000, while the 3,500-square-foot unit with full bar can generate about \$2.1 million. Most restaurants are open weekends until midnight, and Van Grack says, "The place is rockin'," perfect for the college crowd.

Fish out of Water

While the print and TV ads are building awareness among consumers, Van Grack is giving prospective franchisees an education in Hapa. He sent 20 of the top 200 franchisees in the country a live Japanese carp called koi, a water-filled tank and Japanese bamboo.

"These guys are always getting stuff in the mail, like I do, and the truth is, 99 percent of it never sees their desks. An assistant screens it out," Van Grack says. But with the koi, folks have been happy to take his calls, making the \$200- to \$400-per-package expenditure worth it. "The CEO gets on the phone and says, 'You were the one who sent the koi? My assistant adopted the koi. Its name is Fred,'" he says. While the fish haven't lead to a signed deal, Van Grack says this elite group now knows the Hapa Sushi name.

The positive response was as comforting to Schoenberg as it was for Van Grack. "We like to be cocky, but we hadn't heard anything at first, and we had never sent fish to people's offices before. We were sure it was tanking," Schoenberg admits. Hapa may send as many as 75 more koi to other prospective franchisees.

Van Grack believes that the prospective franchisees are aware that "sushi is at the tipping point of popularity. In the mid-'80s, sushi was cool. Now, it is part of the American taste. Just like people refer to Mexican food or Chinese food, they refer to sushi. The Applebee's, Chili's party may be over." 

SNAPSHOT

CONCEPT

Hapa Sushi
Grill/Sake Bar

HEADQUARTERS

Boulder, Colo.

UNITS

3

2005

SYSTEMWIDE SALES

\$5 million
(company estimate)

2006

SYSTEMWIDE SALES

\$6.5 million*

AVERAGE CHECK

Lunch \$9 to \$11,
dinner \$18 to \$25

AVERAGE

UNIT VOLUME

\$750,000 for
smaller units,
\$2.1 million for
larger restaurants

2005 AD BUDGET

\$100,000

AD AGENCY

TDA Advertising
& Design, Boulder,
Colo.

EXPANSION PLANS

100 units within
the next three years

*Chain Leader estimate

GRANT MACPHERSON
EXECUTIVE CHEF

WYNN CASINO
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA



“THE LAS VEGAS DINING EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN TAKEN TO A HIGHER LEVEL AT ALL WYNN LAS VEGAS RESTAURANTS AND WE FOUND EQUIPMENT TO HELP MEET THAT CHALLENGE WITH ALTO-SHAAM.”



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Executive Chef



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The Wright Stuff

*Rock Bottom Brewery
returns to its roots with a
Prairie-style prototype.*

BY LISA BERTAGNOLI





Stacked stainless-steel brewing tanks (l.), displayed behind glass, are visible from anywhere in Rock Bottom's bar or dining room.

(Above, from l.) Older Rock Bottom units display photos of rocks; in the prototype, pictures of happy people express a convivial mood.

Flagstone in the entryway echoes the stone exterior.

A whimsical painting of a chef behind the hostess stand lends a food-and-fun motif to the entryway.

Restaurant chains don't often go to the drawing board with a new prototype in mind and emerge with a building that's smaller and more expensive than the one currently in operation. Yet that's what happened with the new Rock Bottom Restaurant & Brewery in Colorado Springs, Colo. At 9,978 square feet, the restaurant is 12 percent smaller than the average Rock Bottom, and its 293 seats mark a 9 percent drop from the average. Furnishings, fixtures and equipment for the new building totaled \$1.25 million, while FF&E for the average Rock Bottom hovers around \$950,000.

Sound strategy backs what appears to be a business anomaly, says Ned Lidvall, president and CEO of the Louisville, Colo.-based company. The 29 Rock Bottoms are mostly endcaps and remodels in urban areas. To grow where the money is—in lifestyle centers and “power” malls—Rock Bottom needed a freestanding, big-box prototype. “We felt if we were going to be able to find sites, we had to include the possibility of ground-up development,” Lidvall says.

While at the drawing board, Rock Bottom decided to restore some of its signature design elements. Retrofits had moved away from focusing on the brewing equipment and display kitchen, and from its original Prairie-style furnishings and decorative elements, as well.

Original Touches

The new design puts to rest an experimental pub look, says Buck Warfield, senior vice president of development at Rock Bottom. “We felt the original more represented the brand, and that the financial performance was best,” he says.

Rock Bottom started the redesign process in 2003. It called on Joe Vajda, principal at Aria Group Architects of Oak Brook, Ill., to head the project, based on Aria's previous work: “The best [examples] were Melman restaurants,” Warfield says.

Rock Bottom chose Colorado Springs as the site of the prototype for its proximity to headquarters, as well as for media efficiency in the greater Denver market.

SNAPSHOT

CONCEPT

Rock Bottom Restaurant & Brewery

LOCATION

Colorado Springs, Colo.

OPENING DAY

Dec. 15, 2005

DESIGNER

Aria Group Architects, Oak Park, Ill.

AREA

9,978 square feet

SEATS

293

AVERAGE CHECK

\$13 lunch, \$17 dinner

2006 UNIT VOLUME

\$4.5 million (company estimate)

EXPANSION PLANS

3 in 2006, 3 in 2007 and 5 in 2008



(Clockwise from top l.) A slight divide between the dining room and bar allows energy to flow but keeps Rock Bottom's dining area from feeling raucous.

Heavy wooden tables, beamed ceilings and amber geometric light fixtures lend a Prairie touch to the interior.

The dining room attracts affluent families, while younger males are the bar's biggest customers.



One of Rock Bottom's priorities was to make the stainless-steel brewing equipment, which takes up 1,200 square feet, visible to diners once again. "They are part of the theater and drama," Lidvall says. The prototype stacks the vats so everyone in the entire restaurant, not just the bar, can see them.


Another major change is the addition of color, Vajda says. The previous design had a lot of muddy browns and ambers, he says. But the prototype's

ochre and rust paint, plus touches of blue and sage-green glazed brick, add color to the room, as does jewel-toned geometric booth fabric.

Dry-stack flagstone and touches of wood add texture to the interior; the exterior also features those elements, along with heavy timbers and metal planes.

Vajda says a big challenge was incorporating Arts and Crafts elements without making the restaurant look dated. The booth fabric and a contemporary-looking carpet, plus touches of color, balance the substantial wooden chairs and tables and decorative millwork.

The prototype includes more branding elements than past Rock Bottoms. Ceiling banners emblazoned with the names of beers push the brand. Where older stores feature photos of rocks on the walls, the prototype is decorated with photos of people and employees enjoying themselves. The photos add "more conviviality" to the

KEY
 Direction of shot
 1—Shot No.
 Position of camera

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Rock Bottom's freestanding prototype enables the chain to expand into power malls and lifestyle centers.



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APPETIZER

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SOUPS & SALADS

Big Ale's Chili, with flank steak, ground sirloin, black beans, three chiles and ale, \$5.59

ROCK BOTTOM ORIGINALS

Meat Loaf and Mashers, served with vegetables and stout tomato sauce or brown-ale mushroom sauce, \$11.29

ESPECIALLY HEALTHY

Greek Salad with Grilled Chicken, spinach, artichoke hearts, olives, roasted red peppers and tomatoes, feta and red onions with balsamic vinaigrette, \$9.99



(Clockwise from top l.) A coffered ceiling lends an intimate feeling to Rock Bottom's bar area.

Substantial wooden tables and high-backed, slatted wood chairs bow to Frank Lloyd Wright.

In future prototypes, a screen will limit the view from the dining room into the display kitchen.

interior, Director of Marketing Marilyn Davenport says: "They show the faces of the brand."

The 5 Percent Solution

Lidvall says the plan was to open "95 percent right out of the ground, with no mission-critical mistakes," and the prototype achieved that mission. Getting the remaining 5 percent right involves several adjustments, including adding a screen that will shield some mechanical elements and other undesirable kitchen sights from diners.


Rock Bottom also plans to return to its original millwork package. The prototype uses board-and-batten quartersawn and riftsawn oak; the difference "is a matter of taste," Warfield says.

All told, the prototype cost \$2.1 million to build, a figure that includes \$100,000 in weather-related overcharges. Expansion plans call for 11 new units to be built over the next three years, with

the second scheduled to open this spring in Lombard, Ill. A remodeling package for the existing 29 Rock Bottoms will include the new color palette, Frank Lloyd Wright-style furnishings, banners and people photos, at a cost of about \$250,000 per store.

Prototype sales so far are in line with expectations: "This is a \$4.5 million store," Lidvall says.

The restaurant's main bar customers are younger males, while the dining room attracts affluent, highly educated professionals, according to Davenport. She says the prototype has the potential to attract a wider demographic base; the company will conduct one-on-one customer interviews after making the design adjustments to determine which groups those are.

"It's been a fun, natural evolutionary step," Lidvall says of the new building, Rock Bottom's first in its 15-year history. "Now, on to more prototypes." 



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FoodSafety INSIGHTS

CONTENTS

A LETTER FROM NSF

Dear Colleague,

This year, minimizing risk continues to be our ongoing theme in FoodSafety INSIGHTS, now in its third year. Innovation will also be a cornerstone of each of the upcoming FSI issues as we share best practices and integrated solutions that can be applied to the your day-to-day operations.



The lead article, "Seafood Safely," takes a look at best practices and new breakthroughs currently being utilized by operators to counter foodborne risks in seafood.

Our in-depth look will help ensure that your workforce is brought up to speed on allergens, toxins and the latest HACCP initiatives. Even though the focus on this article is on seafood, the key food safety principles within this article also have useful applications across the foodservice industry.

FSI not only highlights new technologies, but also new applications of existing technologies as well. It's one more way that FSI provides news that operators can use to refine business practices and improve the bottom line.

It's still not too late to submit nominations for the 2006 Food Safety Leadership Awards Program, which is now in its third year. Foodservice operators, manufacturers, researchers and members of academia all can be nominated. For nomination information, visit the NSF website at www.nsf.org.

Look for us at the Food Safety World Conference & Expo in Washington, DC, which will be held March 8-10, and the Food Safety Summit, March 22-24 in Las Vegas. It's always a great way to share your thoughts on new innovations, business opportunities and ways we can improve service to the consuming public.

We look forward to an exciting 2006!

—Kevan P. Lawlor, President and CEO,
NSF International

WHAT'S INSIDE

FRONTLINE: NEWS YOU CAN USE

S-4

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Seafood sales are booming, but fish and shellfish are perishable products that must be handled with care—not only for food safety reasons, but also because of food allergies

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For seafood processors, seven-point HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) plans—monitored by the FDA—are mandatory

FEATURE: CHILL FACTOR

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Using a blast chillers bring food down to a safe temperature so rapidly that the chances of bacterial growth are minimized, and foods can be held longer without spoiling



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Publishers: Jeff Berling, Alan Plassche

Art & Design: Marla Camp, Impact Productions

NSF Contact: William Fisher, 1-800-NSF-MARK,
or fisher@nsf.org

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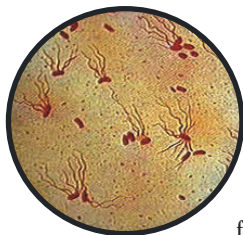
FoodSafety INSIGHTS
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NEW TECHNIQUE KILLS SALMONELLA IN FRUITS WITH RINDS

Pasteurization is an effective technique to kill Salmonella in certain fresh fruits, such as cantaloupes, according to researchers at USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS). The fruit is immersed in water heated to 169° F. for three minutes, then sealed in a plastic bag to prevent re-contamination, before rapid cooling in ice water.



This process has been demonstrated to dramatically reduce levels of Salmonella in cantaloupes but is practical only for fruits with thick rinds, such as cantaloupes, citrus, avocados, and perhaps tomatoes. It ruins leafy vegetables and apples.

Salmonella disease outbreaks have been linked with increasing frequency to fruits and vegetables, including lettuce, salads, melons, sprouts and tomatoes.



NEW ECOLAB R&D FACILITY IS OPEN

Ecolab has opened a new Global Research and Development Center on its 90-acre Allan L. Schuman Campus in Eagan, Minn. The facility will be used for research and development of new products and processes to help foodservice operators. The labs will test products in warewashing, pest elimination, housekeeping, laundry and healthcare categories, among others. The

center will serve customers worldwide and will be supported by Ecolab's technical centers in Europe, Asia and Latin America. Schuman, for whom the campus is named, will retire as Ecolab chairman in May 2006, concluding a 47 year career with the company, and will be named chairman emeritus.

TYSON LAB NETWORK RECEIVES FOOD SAFETY HONOR

The Food Safety and Laboratory Services Network of Tyson Foods Inc., Springdale, AR, has received the prestigious Quality Award presented annually by Food Quality Magazine and DuPont Qualicon. The major protein provider was recognized for ongoing efforts of its quality assurance/quality control

teams in protecting consumer health and satisfaction and in safeguarding the North American food supply.

Tyson's Food Safety and Laboratory Services Network provides technical support to a wide range of areas within Tyson, including live chicken production, sales and market-



ing, research and development, meat and poultry processing facilities and quality assurance. The flagship location is a 25,000-sq.-ft., state-of-the-art food testing and research lab located at Tyson World Headquarters.

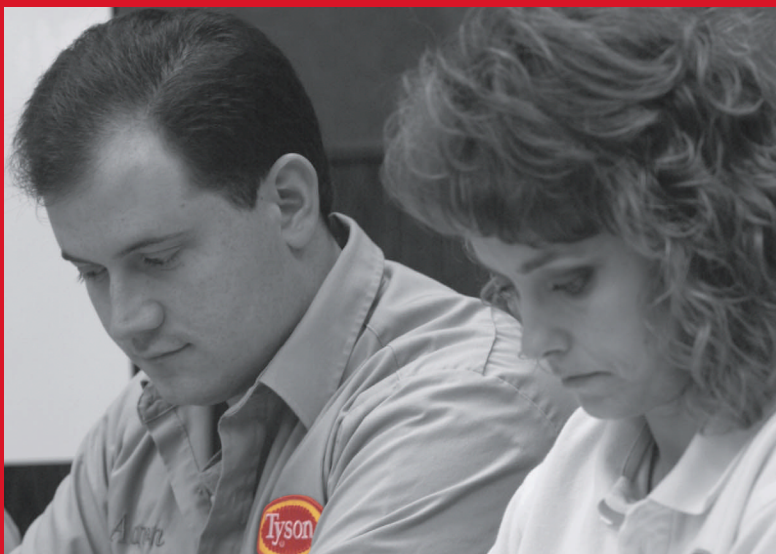
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For more information about our commitment to food safety, visit www.tyson.com.



FRONTLINE

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MCD'S USES FOOD SAFETY AS A MARKETING TOOL

McDonald's Corp. sponsored a two-day media event last fall that was aimed at letting the public know about its food safety and quality measures. New print ads market the fast food giant's "top-quality USDA eggs" and "high-quality chicken."

The Reuters news service was invited to tour one of the company's meat processing plants. Among food safety measures demon-

strated were tests for pathogens such as E. coli, conducted before the meat is permitted into the plant. Tracking capability was also shown. Each box of patties is labeled with a tracking number so it can be traced back to the meat packer. More than 10% of McDonald's beef is currently traceable back to the individual animal.

McDonald's is using its Web site as a message vehicle, as well. A new feature on the



site allows visitors to track how each ingredient of popular menu items is sourced.

FDA OKAYS IRRADIATION FOR SHELLFISH SAFETY

Seafood suppliers will now be able to irradiate oysters, clams and mussels, also known as molluscan shellfish, thanks to approval of this food pasteurization process by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

"Irradiation is an important technology that we can now use to enhance the safety of shellfish products," comments Mike Voisin, chairman of the Molluscan Shellfish Committee of the National Fisheries Institute (NFI), McLean, VA. "We welcome the addition of irradiation to the existing post-harvest processes available to us, which also include quick freezing, low-heat pasteurization and high-pressure processing."

The application of post-harvest food safety technologies such as irradiation, in conjunction with the sanitary controls specified in the National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP) and the mandatory seafood Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) inspection system, reduce the threat of transmitting food-borne illness to consumers.

CHICKEN PRODUCERS TO TEST ALL FLOCKS

Major poultry processors have committed to testing every chicken flock for bird flu, prior to slaughter, to assure the public their products are safe to eat. Companies participating in the initiative account for more than 90% of the nearly 10 billion chickens produced in 2005, according to the National Chicken Council.

Tyson Foods, Inc., the nation's largest chicken supplier, says it already tests all its flocks.

Pilgrim's Pride Corp., another of the largest producers, says it is joining the new testing initiative. Still another producer, Fieldale Farms, will spend a "couple hundred thousand dollars a year" on testing, according to Tom Hensley, executive vice president.

At the same time, chicken consumption is increasing. The average American ate 85 lbs. last year, compared with 84 lbs. in 2004, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

DARDEN SHRIMP SUPPLIERS TO BE CERTIFIED

Darden Restaurants, Inc., Orlando, is requiring its shrimp suppliers to become certified for best practices through the Global Aquaculture Alliance. The Best Aquaculture Practices certification standards specify quantitative international guidelines and auditing procedures to protect the wholesomeness of shrimp throughout the

production process. This includes concerns arising from the presence of pathogenic bacteria, chemical contaminants and aquaculture drugs.

Darden is a leading operator of casual-dining restaurants, including flagship Red Lobster and Olive Garden brands. Global Aquaculture Alliance, St. Louis, MO, is an international nonprofit trade organization dedicated to responsible fish and shellfish farming.



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FOOD SAFETY CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN MARCH

Operators can increase their food safety expertise at a variety of “nuts-and-bolts” workshops to be held at the Food Safety World Conference & Expo, March 8-10, in Washington, DC. The meeting is hosted by Food Safety Magazine and sustaining sponsor, the National Center for Food Safety & Technology.

Sessions will focus on real-world case studies, while symposium/breakout roundtables will offer attendees customized solutions to pressing food safety challenges. Major food companies will attend, as will key food safety agencies and standard-setting bodies, such as the FDA, USDA, and Codex Alimentarius. Research organizations, such as the National Center for Food Safety & Technology/IIT and the AMI Foundation, also will be present. Details can be found at www.foodsafetyworldexpo.com

KFC CALMS PUBLIC'S FEAR ABOUT AVIAN FLU

KFC is taking a proactive approach to quell potential avian flu concerns. The Yum! Brands company has readied a consumer education program—including TV advertising—in case of need. The chain is eager to avoid what happened in China and parts of Europe, where chicken demand dropped from 20% to 40%. Yum! execs speculate that U.S. sales could drop as much as 10% to 20%, based on the China experience.

In addition Yum! devotes part of its web site (under the “Corporate Responsibility” banner) to a detailed FAQ section on avian flu. The operator cites the World Health Organization (WHO) on the safety of properly cooked chicken and allows concerned consumers to link to several more Web sites, including those of the WHO, the Centers for Disease Control, as well as to the U.S. Government Official Pandemic Flu site.

Some 16% of U.S. adults are concerned about a possible “pandemic” of avian flu, according to NPD Group, which has been tracking public awareness of the issue in its Food Safety Monitor. However, proper cooking assures that customers can con-



tinue to enjoy this favorite menu protein safely. Like many microorganisms, the avian flu virus is killed by the heat of normal cooking, according to USDA and the National Chicken Council. Foodservice professionals should consult their state or local food code for proper internal cooking temperatures for meat and poultry, says USDA's Food Safety & Inspection Service.

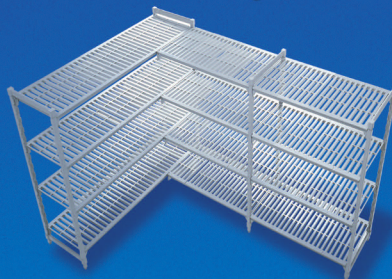
Educational materials are available to reassure patrons who may be concerned: The National Chicken Council (www.nationalchickencouncil.com) has set up a Web page to address consumer concerns, and the U.S. Poultry & Egg Association (www.poultryegg.org) says it is prepared to provide technical support and advice to companies needing assistance in implementing or developing an educational campaign. For more information, also visit www.foodprotection.org/aboutIAFP/AvianFluSB.asp.

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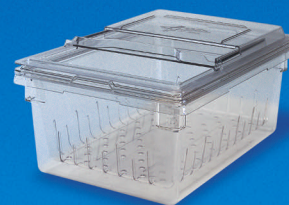
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COVER STORY

Seafood *SAFELY*



The seafood business is booming. Per-capita consumption reached 16.3 pounds in 2003 (the last year for which such statistics were available), up 4.4% from year-earlier figures, and chefs are adding fish and shellfish items to the menu in order to provide consumers with more variety and healthy options.

From a foodborne illness standpoint, however, seafood is highly perishable, and can be risky if not handled correctly—through the supply chain and in the back-of-the-house. In addition, many consumers are allergic to seafood, the third leading food allergen (after eggs and milk), affecting as many as one in 50 Americans. And concerns about pollutants and other toxins, particularly mercury and PCBs, are calling into question the safety of both wild and farm-raised fish and shellfish.

In this special report, FoodSafety INSIGHTS reveals how to serve seafood, safely.

“From a food safety and risk management perspective, the pathogens are no different than they were 20 years ago—the inherent risks haven’t changed,” says C. Dee Clingman, president of CDC Global Quality & Safety, consultants based in Orlando. “What is different is the way operators are purchasing. The real challenges in seafood safety have been actuated as a result of the elonga-

tion of the distribution chain. Instead of purchasing locally, we’re purchasing globally, on the international market, including more frozen and farm-raised product.”

And it’s the links in this elongated chain that put more people, more distance and more time in the process, and, according to Clingman, that means a higher probability of something going wrong.

Many larger companies have addressed the problem by taking over as much of the back-end business of seafood as possible. Legal Sea Foods, the Boston-based operator of more than 30 seafood dinnerhouses, celebrated the opening of a new state-of-the-art Quality Control Center that houses receiving, dry and refrigerated storage, fish cutting and food production areas, and a test kitchen and bakery, as well as a complete testing laboratory staffed by a registered sanitarian. All of the company’s seafood passes through the QC Center’s portals.

Built at a cost of \$15 million, the 75,000-sq.-ft. facility employs 150 people and handles all incoming seafood to rigid HACCP standards, and includes advanced traceability and inventorying capabilities. According to QC director Stephen E. Martinelli, the automated cutting lines include keyboards that allow operators to log in all product for recordkeeping. Computerized temper-

ature monitoring systems are used throughout the delivery and production systems to make sure that product stays properly chilled at every point in the distribution chain. “We get the freshest product in daily, and turn it around to the locations within one day, leaving behind a record of every single item that’s come through here,” says Martinelli.



Legal Sea Foods has its own processing plant and QA lab

Many larger companies have addressed the problem by taking over as much of the back-end business of seafood as possible

In addition, the lab is equipped with sophisticated testing equipment, such as a cold vapor atomic absorption machine to test swordfish and tuna for mercury, and the means to do enzyme-linked assay tests for scombroid food poisoning—a naturally occurring process that creates histamines which may cause a severe allergic reaction.

Darden Restaurants, parent of Red Lobster, Olive Garden and several other restaurant concepts, has had an industry leading “pond-to-plate” system in place for more than 25 years, evolving by leaps and bounds as the industry has changed and the global purchasing arena has grown. “Today we are bringing product in from 40 different countries, notes Tom Chestnut, Darden vice president of total quality, “and that all has to be managed.”

To that end, Darden has its own labs in locations throughout North America—including facilities for rigorous organoleptic and microbiological testing—as well as a network of approved labs throughout the world, which allow the company to deal directly with suppliers in markets as far-flung as China, India, Thailand and Singapore.

Once the seafood leaves the lab, it enters a distribution network that is tightly controlled at every turn, including numerous audit functions that ensure proper handling, rotation, storage and so on. Once in the restaurants, fish and shellfish are treated via a HACCP-based system that has also been in place for more than two dozen years.



Red Lobster has had a "pond-to-plate" system in place for more than 25 years

“We’ve taken it down to the simplest common denominator,” explains Chestnut, employing such in-unit safety procedures as constant time-temperature monitoring, color-coded cutting boards, rigorous personal hygiene standards, and other science-based training aimed at managing the critical control points. In addition, the restaurants are monitored quarterly, by both an in-house QA team and a third party. And many of the company’s regional-level QA team comes from the ranks of health-department professionals, to ensure that all of the systems deployed are based on real-world circumstances.

HACCP, in fact, has emerged as one of the operator’s best friends when it comes to serving seafood safely (see related story, p. S-14). At Atlantic Culinary Academy in Dover, NH, part of the Cordon Bleu culinary system, students are taught to follow

HACCP protocols whenever handling fish and shellfish, according to chef-instructor Jack Haggerty. “We teach our students to use it quickly, and handle it properly,” says Haggerty. In fact, the first thing new students learn is food safety training, in a six-week program that runs concurrently with the Basic Skills module. “If they don’t pass the test, they can’t move on.”

In addition, as part of its role to familiarize students with new technologies and products available to them, the school has been participating in an onsite test of electrolyzed water as a sanitizer and dip (see sidebar). A compact wall-mounted unit provides the kitchens with enough acidic and alkaline solutions to conduct all of its sanitizing and rinsing needs. “We use it for produce and seafood, and have found that it can extend shelf life by several days,” says Haggerty. Of course, with a 60-seat public restaurant, L’Esprit, which enjoys seafood sales of about 25% of the total menu mix, very little seafood hangs around the kitchen that long. “We teach freshness and proper handling here, first and foremost.”

Mitchell’s Fish Market is another operation whose livelihood depends on freshness. “Mitchell’s is designed to be the ultimate fresh seafood restaurant,” says Wayne Schick, vice president and executive corporate chef for parent company Cameron Mitchell Restaurants, Columbus, OH, which numbers 15 fish-market based restaurants among its stable of more than half-a-dozen concepts. “Every fish market

COVER STORY

Seafood, Safely

has a dedicated seafood walk-in for the proper butchering and storage. Throughout the receiving, butchering and prep processes, product is maintained at 36 degrees."

In addition to providing temperature control, having separate walk-ins also allows the area to be cleaned daily with a 100-ppm chlorine-based solution. "We have not seen anything that beats the tried-and-true methods of a great sanitation and seafood-handling plan," says Schick. "Add a very cold storage room and lots of ice, and you have everything you need."



**"MITCHELL'S IS
DESIGNED TO BE
THE ULTIMATE
FRESH SEAFOOD
RESTAURANT,"**

**—WAYNE SCHICK, VP AND
EXECUTIVE CORPORATE
CHEF, CAMERON MITCHELL
RESTAURANTS**

New Processing Techniques

A number of new technologies directed at enhancing the safety and extending the shelf life of seafood (as well as other foods) are in various phases of development, including:

ELECTROLYZED WATER — Also called anolyte, functional water, super-oxidized water, and electrolyzed acidic water—among other names—electrolyzed water results when ordinary tap water and salt undergo electrolysis, resulting in two new streams of water: a dilute hypochlorous acid solution that eliminates most pathogens from surfaces (including produce, seafood and other foods) within seconds, and an alkaline dilute sodium hydroxide solution that can be used to remove oils, greases and fats in cleaning applications. In food preparation, the electrolyzed alkaline water is often used first to remove gross proteinaceous contamination, followed by application of the electrolyzed acidic solution to eliminate pathogens; this treatment extends shelf life and kills both bacteria and viruses. With some systems no salt residue remains on surfaces, so post-treatment rinsing is not necessary.

LIQUID ICE — A mixture of freezing water and ice, made from filtered sea water, is being used on board fishing vessels to extend product shelf life while preserving quality. Because the freezing system is kept between 0°C and -2°C, the fish doesn't actually freeze but is kept at such a low temperature that its preservation and its quality and properties are better maintained.

MICROWAVE TECHNOLOGY — Stemming from a Defense Department initiative, several public and private sector interests have developed a new high-powered microwave sterilization process that could have implications for the seafood industry. The process, which takes 10 minutes to sterilize fish (compared to an hour-and-a-half for conventional canning) involves sealing product in an airtight plastic tray, submerging it in a water bath, and then microwaving. The speed of the process, while not appropriate for all foods, alleviates some of the textural damage of retorting, while still achieving a high pathogen kill rate.

OZONE TREATMENT — Ozone is a naturally occurring substance that can also be generated in controlled environments—such as aquaculture farms or seafood processing facilities—to effectively control specific bacteria, viruses and molds. It is the strongest oxidant and disinfectant available, yet decomposes into oxygen once its work is done.

PROCESSING UNDER PRESSURE — In high pressure processing (HPP)—also referred to as ultra high pressure processing (UHP) or hydrostatic pressure processing (HHP)—food is subjected to elevated pressures (from about 14,000 pounds per square inch, or psi, to 130,000 or more, depending upon the product). HPP has proved very effective in killing/inactivating many foodborne pathogens (including *Listeria*, salmonella and *E. coli* O157:H7, as well as yeasts and molds), and is capable of extending shelf life far beyond that of thermal processing methods such as pasteurization. Seafood does particularly well under pressure; one of the most exciting new applications for HPP is in the area of shellfish, such as lobster, which can be processed right in the shell.



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COVER STORY

ALLERGIES

Seafood, including fish, shellfish and mollusks, is the third leading cause of food allergy (after eggs and milk), according to the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN). A recent study published in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* indicated that as many as 1 in 50 American adults may be allergic to shellfish (especially shrimp, crab and lobster), compared with 1 in 250 who may be allergic to fish. The fish most commonly associated with allergic reactions include cod, salmon, trout, herring, sardines, bass, orange roughy, halibut and tuna—some of the most common varieties on menus. (Canning tuna or salmon sometimes changes the fish protein enough that fish-allergic individuals can tolerate them, but not always.)

People who are allergic to one type of shellfish or finfish have a good chance of being allergic to other types of shellfish or finfish as well. Some consumers who are allergic to shellfish (such as shrimp) are not allergic to mollusks (i.e., oysters, clams).

While many people know they have food allergies and will take the necessary steps to avoid those foods, it is not safe to assume that it's a case of letting the buyer beware, especially in the case of young children.

Last summer, the National Restaurant Association teamed up with Phil Lempert, the food

editor of NBC's "Today Show," to launch a public service tool for consumers called the Food Allergy Buddy (FAB) Dining Card. The card, available as a free download from <http://www.foodallergybuddy.com/>, helps diners to easily communicate any specific food allergies to waitstaff and chefs.

PRECAUTIONS TO TAKE

- ◆ Make sure key unit personnel are trained in how to respond to allergic reactions as well as other medical emergencies; CPR and emergency first-aid training is never a bad idea, for the safety of both employees and guests
- ◆ Some operators put a note on the menu inviting customers to advise their servers of any food allergies or special dietary requests; waitstaff should always be trained to handle such information in a sensitive, caring and responsive manner
- ◆ Maintain separate fryers for shellfish, mollusks, and fish, as the oil can cause allergic reactions in non-seafood; allergic persons should be cautious about ordering fried food
- ◆ Maintain separate prep and assembly surfaces for the same reason (always a good idea anyway)
- ◆ Be careful in describing combination seafood menu items that contain multiple types of seafood ingredients; all ingredients—not just the principle one—should be listed or made available
- ◆ The following can contain anchovies or other fish: Caesar and other salad dressings, Worcestershire sauce, marinara sauce; hot dogs, pizza toppings, bologna and ham can all contain surimi

TOXINS

ABOUT MERCURY AND METHYLMERCURY

After years of scientific reviews and consumer press, it seems that consumer concern about environmental toxins in seafood has finally reached some sort of critical mass. In California, a 2004 law mandates that retailers post warnings that pregnant women and children limit their intake of certain seafood products that contain large amounts of mercury. Last fall, Safeway Inc.—one of the nation's largest grocery chains—announced that it would post such warnings nationwide. And the Cheesecake Factory has quietly taken several fresh tuna items off the menu, including its Grilled Fresh Ahi Tuna Burger. Less well-circulated—but gaining ground—are concerns about levels of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in farm-raised salmon, which along with sustainability issues have caused many operators to move to wild-caught salmon.

While many experts argue—and convincingly at that—that the health benefits from eating seafood far outweigh any negatives, the point is that the issue has appeared on the consumer radars, and the thoughtful marketer of seafood must take note. "We now have testing capabilities that can detect parts per billion, not just parts per million," says Stephen E. Martinelli, director of Legal Sea Foods Quality Control Center. "That allows us to stay way ahead of the curve of scientific evidence."

◆ Mercury is a naturally occurring element and a part of the earth's crust, oceans and atmosphere.

◆ Most fish contain trace amounts of methylmercury, the organic form of mercury found in bodies of water. At high levels (more likely to occur in such pelagic species as shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish), methylmercury may harm an unborn baby or young child's developing nervous system, which is why the federal government has stringent regulations regarding mercury levels in the fish.

◆ The FDA's limit on mercury is 1 ppm (parts per million)

SOURCE: Real Mercury Facts

PCBS IN FOOD

Unfortunately, PCBs and similar compounds are so widespread in the environment that they are in the air we breathe, the water we drink and swim in, and the foods we eat. Since they are virtually impossible to avoid, it is important that information is available so that consumers can make informed choices about how to 1) minimize PCB intake in the diet, and 2) choose foods that provide the greatest health benefits relative to the trace amounts of PCBs they may contain.

While trace amounts of PCBs do exist in salmon, both wild and farmed, they are well below the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) tolerance level of 2,000 parts per billion (ppb). Recent tests show farmed salmon averages 27 ppb (parts per billion)

SOURCE: Salmon of the Americas

Seafood HACCP

For seafood processors, seven-point HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) plans—monitored by the FDA—are mandatory. The FDA inspects processor plants annually. Processors must record the steps of their HACCP plans on a regular basis. If violations are found, FDA notifies the processor which must implement corrective action. The FDA typically does not post such violations, but foodservice operators can contact their state and local health departments, many of which provide such information on their own Web sites, according to Shirley Bohm, consumer safety officer at the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN). In addition, she notes, it is important for operators to provide purchasing specs that hold suppliers to desired levels of performance.

Among main critical points for fresh seafood of all types, is temperature control, says Bohm. The minimum control point for protecting fish and shellfish at operator level is 41 to 45 degrees F, she explains. The lower the temperature, the longer the shelf life: At 41 degrees F, fresh seafood has a seven-day shelf life; at 45 degrees F, four days. For processors, on the other hand,

shelf life is determined by such factors as where the product is harvested and how the processor handles it.

In FY 2003, approximately 91% of domestic and international seafood processors and importers were in compliance with U.S. HACCP requirements, according to CFSAN.

At the same time, regulators are required to assist operators in developing and implementing voluntary strategies to strengthen existing systems and to prevent the occurrence of food-borne illness risk factors, according to the FDA Food Code. Elements of an effective seafood—and all food—safety management system for operators, according to the Code, may include the following:

- ◆ Certified food protection managers who have passed a test that is part of an accredited program
- ◆ Standard operating procedures (SOPs) for performing critical operational steps in a food preparation process, such as cooling
- ◆ Recipe cards that contain specific steps for preparing a food item and the food safety critical limits, such as final cooking temperatures, that need to be monitored and verified

- ◆ Purchase specifications
- ◆ Employee health policy for restricting or excluding ill employees
- ◆ Manager and employee training
- ◆ Specific goal-oriented plans, such as Risk Control Plans (RCPs), which outline procedures for controlling food-borne illness risk factors.

A HACCP plan contains many of these elements and provides a comprehensive framework by which an operator can effectively con-

trol the occurrence of food-borne illness risk factors, according to FDA.

The principles of HACCP are an integral part of the draft *FDA's Recommended Voluntary National Retail [including Foodservice Operators] Food Regulatory Program Standards*. A complete set of Program Standards is available through FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN) Web site at www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/ret-toc.html. NSF HACCP course information can be found at: www.nsf.org/cphe/.

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FEATURE

Chill Factor

For many of us, February brings wind-chills that make a relatively balmy 35° F feel like 20 below.

The cold air blows away the insulating layer of air around us and draws away our body heat more quickly. That's exactly how a blast chiller works. When foods are placed in a blast chiller, the moving air draws heat out of the food so quickly that the temperature falls through the danger zone (140° F–40° F) fast enough to minimize the chances of bacterial growth. That means less of a chance of foodborne illness, and foods can be held longer without spoiling.

THE CONCEPT. Most chillers are capable of lowering the temperature of foods removed from the stove or oven at 165° F to roughly 40° F, in less than two hours. This means that those foods spend minimal time in the temperature danger zone where harmful bacteria could multiply. The concept of cooking, chilling, then reheating (rethermalizing) at a later time is not new. It was first conceived in the late 1960s when it was called “ready foods,” and the concept still holds true today.

The advantage to what we now call cook-chill is that cooked foods—and the labor required to cook them—are “packaged” together into a pull-from-the-refrigerator container that can be rethermalized and served in less time and with less effort than if you were to make it from scratch close to the time of service. The concept helps you spread your labor over more hours, thus elim-

inating the “crunch” that is common in so many foodservice locations when service periods begin.

Cook-chill programs also offer important economies of scale because your staff can make chicken in red wine or pans of lasagna for several meal periods at one time. So, instead of hand slicing onions for 20 servings, your staff can use a food processor to cut onions for 80 servings. That can decrease your labor cost per portion made. And, because you have back-up pans of lasagna, you won't have to take it off your menu because of unexpectedly high demands during a given meal period. That decreases stress on your staff and improves customer satisfaction.

Blast chillers should also be used to chill foods that will later be served cold. For example, the cooked chicken breasts that you will dice and use in your Mediterranean Chicken Salad are chilled quickly enough to minimize the potential for foodborne illness. And you can cook and chill several days' worth of chicken at one time.

CHOOSE YOUR FEATURES. Your choice of blast chillers should closely match the needs of your operation. Blast chillers are sized for the smallest of operations, where safely chilling 35 lb. of food per batch may only be necessary a few days a week. On the other hand, you may need a unit that can chill 500+ lb. of product per batch in a commissary operation that supports multiple outlets.



Traulsen's SmartChill microprocessor control system provides critical temperature monitoring, and is NAFEM Data Control compliant

Among other features, consider the following when comparing different models:

◆ **Pounds Per Cycle**—Match this number to your production needs. If you need a blast chiller that offers a quick way to chill a single grilled chicken breast that will go on a chicken Caesar, you need a model with minimal output. You also have to consider if you plan to make several batches of a given item throughout the day, or make just one large batch. You gain the most economies by making larger batches. So you need to match the production batch size with the capacity of the blast chiller you choose.

While pounds per cycle is a common way to compare models, it's important to consider the thickness of the foods that you will chill. For example, a blast chiller rated at 150 lb. per cycle will require more time to chill 150 lb. of roasted rib-eye to a core temperature below 40° F than if you were to chill 150 lb. of two-inch-thick lasagna.

◆ **Cycle Time**—Some models are listed with cycle times of 90 minutes while others require 120 minutes per cycle. While the longer cycle time is short enough to ensure the safe chilling of foods, it limits the number of batches that can be chilled per shift. That impacts the total vol-


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FEATURE

Chill Factor

ume of product that you'll be able to process per chiller per shift. Cycle times will also be affected by the temperature of the air in your blast chiller. Some models offer adjustable temperatures. For example, you can purchase a chiller that operates at 28° F when chilling delicate foods like crab-stuffed sole filets. For thick cuts of meat or deep pans of stew, the chiller can be operated at -4° F.

◆ Start & End Temperatures—

While most models calculate cycle times in terms of 140° F to 40° F, some use a higher starting temperature. The cycle times on some models are based on a starting temperature of 194° F and an ending temperature of 37° F. When you choose a model you need to consider the starting temperature of the foods that you

plan to place in your blast chiller. Most manufacturers have cycle times based on foods at different starting temperatures, so contact them directly before making your final purchase decision.

◆ Blast Chill/Blast Freeze

Capabilities—If you never plan to freeze the foods that you've prepared, you won't need a model with blast freezing capabilities. On the other hand, if you do choose a dual functionality model you could prepare some items in batches that would last you several weeks in the freezer without product deterioration and other items for use within a week that are held at refrigerated temperatures.

◆ HACCP Documentation—

At a minimum, you need a readout so that you can note and

record the internal temperature of foods as they cool in your blast chiller. Many models can be equipped with a printer that prints internal temperature readings over time from each probe. If you intend to use your blast chiller for large batches, ship foods to remote locations, or prepare foods that might be integrated in home meal replacement (HMR) options, blast chillers equipped with PC-compatible readouts that allow you to download the temperature profile of foods as they chill are a must.

◆ Remote Compressor—

Generally, small-capacity blast chillers have built-in compressors. But blast chillers put out a lot of heat—heat that can make a kitchen uncomfortable in the summer. If you need a high-

capacity chiller, look at those that can be piped to a remote compressor so that all of the waste heat ends up outdoors.

◆ Roll-In / Roll-Through—

Roll-in capabilities mean you can load and unload your chiller quickly. That increases the amount of food that can be chilled per shift. The loaded cart can be quickly rolled to a walk-in for long-term storage with little labor input, thus minimizing labor costs.

Most manufacturers offer a variety of models from which to choose.

Match the needs of your operation to each model, and check the warranty and the power requirements before making your final purchase decision.



This Alto-Sham blast chiller features convenient roll-in capabilities

BLAST CHILLER COMPARISONS

Brand / Model	Capacity Pounds Per Batch	HP Rating	Remote compressor option available	Roll-in feature	HACCP Interface / Print-Out	Temperature Probe(s)	Automatic or Manual Mode
Victory VCB-35	35	3/4	No	No	No	Yes	Both
Cres Cor CCBC-12-UA-100	100	2.5	No	No	Yes	Yes	Both
Henny Penny BCC-140	140	2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Both
Traulsen RBC200	200	4 plus 3/4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Both
Alto-Sham QC-100	240	3.5	Yes	Yes	Option	Yes	Both
Electrolux Air-O-System 101	400	2.5	No	Yes	Yes	Option	Both
Master-Bilt MCR-400	500	6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Auto
Randell BC-10	100	1.5	No	No	Yes	Yes	Both

BLAST CHILLERS FIT ALL MARKET SEGMENTS. HERE IS A SAMPLING:

ELECTROLUX

air-o-system
blast chiller /
freezer-101



VICTORY

VBC-35
blast chiller



RANDELL

BC-10
blast chiller



CRES COR

CCBC-12-UA-100 blast chiller



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- ✓ Bathrooms regularly cleaned with a commercial-grade disinfectant;
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Natural Resources

Tara Wefers cultivates Burgerville's QSR menu with sustainable ingredients. BY MONICA ROGERS

Not just any fish and chips, Burgerville's North Pacific halibut platter features mercury-free halibut from the Bering Sea.

You're in the Pacific Northwest, and you want good food, quickly: a restaurant meal featuring, say, hazelnut-shell-smoked blue cheese on your salad of baby brunia, arugula and tatsoi topped with organic cranberries and apples grown near the banks of the Columbia River. Follow that with an entree of additive-free, Northwest-bred, grass-fed beef; a side of buttermilk-battered, hand-cut Walla Walla sweet onion rings; and perhaps a sundae of locally made ice cream with fresh-picked Oregon strawberries to finish.

No need to head to a high-end independent. You can get all that for just over \$10 at Burgerville, the Vancouver, Wash.-based quick-service chain.

Really. Burgerville's standard hamburger is \$1.09, processed from the same grass-fed beef as the best-selling \$4.49 Colossal Cheeseburger. The only difference is the bigger model includes cheese and a half-pound of meat. And the chain's highest-priced menu item—a three-piece platter of North Pacific halibut with chips—tops out at \$5.99.

That a burger chain would and could menu many fresh, local, sustainable ingredients in what Vice President of Marketing and menu development lead Tara Wefers calls “a fiscally sustainable fashion” exemplifies progress the sustain-





MENU SAMPLER

BURGERS

Tillamook Cheeseburger: quarter-pound of ground beef with Tillamook cheddar cheese, green-leaf lettuce, tomato, pickle, ketchup and mayo on a sesame-seed bun, \$3.19

NORTH PACIFIC HALIBUT

Halibut Fish & Chips: three pieces of mercury-free halibut from the Bering Sea, batter-dipped and deep-fried in trans-fat-free oil, served with tartar sauce, lemon wedge and french fries, \$5.99

TURKEY

Nine Grain Turkey Club: slow-roasted turkey breast, two slices of peppered bacon, Swiss cheese, green-leaf lettuce, tomato and mayo on a wheat bun, \$3.49

SALAD

Wild Coho Smoked Salmon & Hazelnut Salad: salad greens topped with smoked salmon, Tillamook cheddar cheese, roasted Oregon hazelnuts, grape tomatoes, shredded carrot, red cabbage, croutons and choice of dressing, \$5.19

With baby greens, organic cranberries and locally grown apple slices, the best-selling Rogue River Smokey Blue Salad replaced the Smoked Turkey and Hazelnut Salad, which wasn't selling.

able-food movement has made. Sustainability—using earth-friendly methods to grow, raise and process foods for consumption nearby—has gained support in recent years, especially on the West Coast.

"It's still unusual to see a burger chain do something like this," says Matthew Buck, assistant director of the Food Alliance, a third-party certifier of sustainable agricultural practices. "But Burgerville has always swum against the current in its efforts to use fresh, locally sourced product."

Fresh, Local, Marketable

The chain sees sustainability as a logical, and highly marketable, step on the fresh-

Guests flock to Burgerville's seasonal promos. Summer sales are 15 percent higher than the rest of the year.

local path it's always walked. And it's got the numbers to prove it. Sales at the privately held company have increased 4 to 8 percent each year since a dramatic 1995 turnaround, when sales jumped 20 percent in response to reimagining, new menus and strong emphasis on local, fresh products. And food and labor costs have risen less than 1 percent since going full bore with the program.

"Somewhere in the early '90s, we found that we just couldn't compete in the long term with the burger titans," explains Chief Cultural Officer Jack Graves.

"Our guest counts had been declining," adds CEO Tom Mears. "So we refocused on our core values on what we did to make Burgerville unique."

Burgerville began more strongly promoting its burgers, which had always been made with fresh, locally raised and processed beef, newly topped with ingredients such as Tillamook cheddar and peppered bacon. Milkshakes became a perfect vehicle for showcasing seasonal, locally grown produce: strawberries in early summer, raspberries and blackberries mid-summer, huckleberries through September, and pumpkin and hazelnuts in the fall and winter.

Burgerville switched to additive- and hormone-free, grass-fed beef in 2004. The chain added Oregon-grown hazelnuts in 2002. And it's been using mercury-free halibut from the Bering Sea since 1998, and Alaskan halibut before that.

The Search Continues

Wefers, who left a position as president of a high-tech services firm to join Burgerville in November 2004, says menu development is a collaborative process that she is responsible for orchestrating throughout parent company The Holland Inc. "I have a real passion for food and for finding inno-

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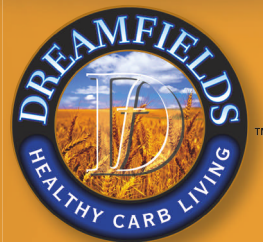
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SNAPSHOT

CONCEPT

Burgerville

PARENT COMPANY

The Holland Inc.,
Vancouver, Wash.

UNITS

39

2005

SYSTEMWIDE SALES

\$60.1 million*

AVERAGE

UNIT VOLUME

\$1.5 million*

AVERAGE CHECK

\$7

EXPANSION PLANS

1 prototype rebuilt
from a former unit
in 2006; 2 to 4 units
in 2007

*Chain Leader estimate



What makes a burger a Pacific Northwest burger?
Grass-fed, locally raised beef, topped with Tillamook cheddar and peppered bacon.

Fresh Hurdles

Training staff how to handle the huge influx of fresh ingredients is also a challenge. Strawberries start arriving in March, with units going through about eight flats a day. "Each year we train our staff to quickly clean, hull and chop these berries in order to ensure freshness," Wefers says. Berries are mixed with sugar, spooned over sundaes, blended into shakes and served with shortcake.

Likewise, Walla Walla onions, which are featured through the summer, are delicate to work with. "To ensure consistent quality, each year we have a training session at one of our supplier partners to teach trainers the best ways to slice the onions, coat them in batter, season and fry them," Wefers says.

In addition to specials tied to seasonal products, Wefers and team continue to enhance the core menu with high-quality, sustainable ingredients that can be sourced year-round. In 2005, smoked blue cheese from an Oregon creamery, made from 100 percent cream and cold-smoked over Oregon-hazelnut shells for 16 hours, was the star. Wefers first featured it in the Rogue River Smokey Blue Salad, \$5.19, which Burgerville tested in 2005 before moving it onto the core menu in 2006. "The Rogue River Smokey Blue Cheese is an artisan cheese that our guests enjoy, so we'd like to

vative ways to integrate the true flavors of the Northwest with our fresh, local sustainable platform," she says.

Wefers and team have continued to build on that platform. "Item by item, the menu is reviewed to reflect that equation wherever possible," she says.

In many instances, the challenge is finding a large enough local supply to fit the bill. Wefers has spent more than a year searching for free-range, hormone- and antibiotic-free, vegetable-fed chickens. She's also been trying to source antibiotic-free shell eggs produced from free-range hens and no-till sustainable wheat from Eastern Washington.

In tandem with ingredient research, Wefers and team work to maintain and embellish Burgerville's highly successful seasonal-foods promotional calendar. Beyond locally grown berries, hand-cut Walla Walla Sweet Onion Rings, \$1.99 for three pieces, continue to score as a huge summer attraction, followed by Sweet Potato Fries, \$1.99, in the fall and Chocolate Hazelnut Shake, \$3.59, in the winter.

According to Wefers, guest counts during the summer promotion spike approximately 15 percent. "People come out in droves when the sun shines," she says. "It's a beautiful time of year here." And while she can't substantiate with numbers, she says the fall and winter promotions also do well.

Featuring many season-specific items with the added onus that they be sustainable is no easy task for a chain with 39 stores throughout Oregon and Southwest Washington. "Each item has to be carefully tracked to ensure practices are sustainable, supply is there and flavor is excellent,"

Wefers says. She is reviewing wild huckleberries, for example, to ensure that harvesting methods remain sustainable. If not, they'll be off the menu this summer.

Burgerville's sundaes are made with locally made ice cream and come with choice of topping such as fresh-picked, seasonal berries.



Summer is berry season at Burgerville, featuring fresh, locally picked strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and more.



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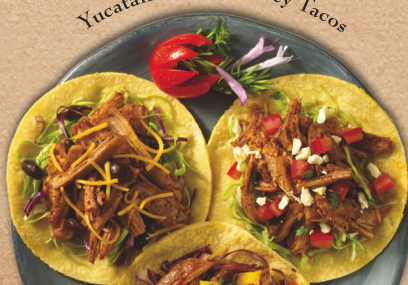


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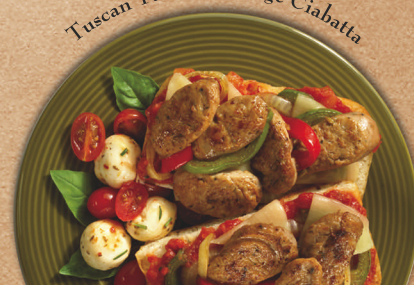
Turkey Medallions Pasta and Spinach Salad



Yucatan Pulled Turkey Tacos



Tuscan Turkey Sausage Ciabatta



The Walla Walla Sweet Onion Rings are part of Burgerville's successful summer promotions, when guest counts increase 15 percent.



offer it in more ways," she explains.

Wefers will use the cheese in the Rogue River Smokey Blue Cheese Burger, \$4.69, scheduled to launch as a limited-time offer in March. It follows in the footsteps of a 2005 burger LTO, the Barbecue Bacon Colossal Cheeseburger, \$3.99, which reached top-three status during its six-week run in September and October.

"We have several special burgers like this that we feature from time to time as limited offers," Graves says. "They allow for us to be creative with our local ingredients and invite guests to try variations of their favorite burgers."

Finding large enough supply of sustainable ingredients is Burgerville's constant challenge.

From Good to Better

Looking at the 12-category core menu, Wefers says performance is good, but there's room for improvement. She wants more side dishes beyond french fries and side salad. "Guests know they can substitute apple slices for fries," she says. "But we are definitely looking at potential additions and embellishments to the list wherever we can find something fresh and local that's available year-round." She says something innovative with cheese is a possibility, as are vegetable options such as fried mushrooms.

Burgerville's Kids Menu, also limited to a short list of hamburger, cheeseburger and chicken strips, is due for expansion or evaluation in 2007. "We're reviewing entrees and snack-type items targeted for a number of ages," Wefers says. "We've brainstormed a bunch of items but have not made a firm decision on what we'll move forward with."

Another concern is building breakfast business, which only makes up 10 percent of sales. Tests thus far have paired Wild Coho salmon with eggs on a sandwich and fruit with yogurt in smoothies.


Upgrades Beyond the Menu

Underscoring all these menu improvements, Burgerville is working to align itself more closely in customer minds as fast casual rather than quick service. It's a move that makes sense, given the chain's high-end food focus, strong regional slant and limited table service. But the '50s-diner design has a more QSR look. So Burgerville designed a prototype for expansion with a Pacific Northwest ambience and added emphasis on service.

Opening this year, the prototype (a remodel of an existing unit) will include open beam ceilings, red stone floors and leather-look upholstery in more family-friendly seating layouts and will have additional employees it dubs "guest ambassadors" dedicated to bringing food to tables and refilling glasses.

Could there be a Burgerville East in the plans? "Anything could happen," says Wefers. "With national expansion, Burgerville would approach each geography with a fresh, local stance, specific to each region."

But for the short term, Wefers says it makes more sense to stay in the Pacific Northwest: "We are going to listen to how our guests respond to the new restaurant design and will consider it moving forward." **CL**






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Adults are the center of attention at Houlihan's. Unlike most casual-dining chains, which cater to families, Houlihan's targets Gen Xers and baby boomers. So alcohol plays a big role, making up 20 percent of the chain's sales.

But alcohol service also means stringent laws and high costs. Forty-three states plus Washington, D.C., have laws that hold restaurants and bars financially and legally liable for the actions of intoxicated guests after they leave those establishments. More states are requiring servers to take alcohol-service training. And liquor-liability insurance comes with both high premiums and deductibles. So Houlihan's was looking for training that would provide responsible alcohol service without affecting sales.

Taking Responsibility

The company switched to a third-party program last August from its outdated, in-house alcohol training. Designed to train all front-of-the-house staff to serve alcohol responsibly, Houlihan's new alcohol-service training program covers alcohol law, recognizing and preventing intoxication, checking IDs and handling difficult situations with guests.

The staff completes the program in three to five hours under the guidance of a unit manager certified to teach it, before taking an exam. Employees at new stores are required to take the advanced test, a secured exam proctored by the instructor and graded by the training-service provider. Staff at existing units can take the primary exam, which covers the same content as the advanced exam but is not overseen by a proctor.

Those who pass either exam receive a certification valid for three years.

Director of Beverage Dave Brown says the training is more current than the chain's in-house program, which hadn't been updated in seven years and only took 30 minutes to complete; the training service plans to update the program every three to four years. Brown also finds the information to be thorough yet easy for the employees to digest because it is presented with a lot of visuals and case studies and uses role-playing to illustrate important points.

And the program is not only accepted as an approved alcohol-training program in 45 states, it also has state supplements to address state-specific requirements—essential for an expanding national chain like Houlihan's, which plans to open 60 units in the next two years, Brown says.

Houlihan's upgrades to a third-party provider for responsible alcohol-service training. BY MAYA NORRIS

Under the INFLUENCE

SNAPSHOT

CONCEPT

Houlihan's

HEADQUARTERS

Kansas City, Mo.

UNITS

86

2005

SYSTEMWIDE SALES

\$255 million

2006

SYSTEMWIDE SALES

\$348 million

(company estimate)

AVERAGE CHECK

\$14.89 with alcohol

AVERAGE

UNIT VOLUME

\$2.53 million for company stores; \$3.2 million for franchised stores

EXPANSION PLANS

60 in two years



LIQUID MEASURE

Houlihan's new responsible alcohol-service training program covers alcohol law, recognizing and preventing intoxication, checking IDs and handling difficult situations with guests.



The Bottom Line

But most of all, Houlihan's new training program gives servers confidence, Brown says: "A lot of programs that you'll see out there scare people from serving alcohol. But this educates them and makes them feel more comfortable."


"A lot of servers are young and inexperienced with alcohol, and when they feel uncomfortable, they tend not to suggest it," he explains. "And when they feel more comfortable about what they can or can't do, they're more comfortable about suggesting it. So if anything, it would help your sales rather than hinder it."

The National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation developed the training, called ServSafe Alcohol. By bringing together a cross-functional group of experts ranging from chain operators to physicians to law-enforcement and regulatory agencies, the NRAEF wanted to create a program that balances responsible alcohol service with a restaurant's bottom line. "Some programs out there are opposite of that. They recommend slowing service and doing some things that maybe aren't right for the operation," says Julie Kanouse, director of ServSafe Alcohol. "And that's one of the key things: This was created by industry for industry."

Peace of Mind

Houlihan's has already seen a return on investment. While Brown will only say that the company had "minimal" legal claims filed against it in the past, Houlihan's hasn't had a claim since implementing the program. In addition, the chain uses a third-party auditing system that sends "checkers," aged 21 to 25, twice a month to units to test whether employees are carding customers. Initially some units failed, but currently all stores have passed.

Since it has found success with the training, Houlihan's plans to use the online version introduced in January. It also expects to purchase the program for managers, which is currently in development.

Houlihan's won't say how much it paid for ServSafe Alcohol, but Brown says, "At the end of the day, the cost is more than worth it to have that peace of mind and know that you're putting your people in a position where they feel comfortable." 



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The P.F. of P.F. Chang's China Bistro—and, not incidentally, the Fleming of Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar as well as the Paul of Paul Lee's Chinese Kitchen—is sipping soda water laced with bitters to “aid digestion.” Good thing. He’s just knocked off a plate of pot stickers and is about to dig into highly seasoned chicken, beef and scallop dishes at a P.F. Chang’s in Newport Beach, Calif.

(From l.) Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar, which Fleming founded with Bill Allen, who is now CEO of Outback, found wide appeal with women, who liked the softened atmosphere and the 100 wines available by the glass.

The 77-unit Pei Wei Asian Diner, a fast-casual concept with average volumes of \$2 million plus, has demonstrated the niche for Asian fast food is larger than anyone thought.

P.F. Chang's China Bistro's \$1.3 billion market cap proves that Chinese food and a casual-dining environment are a potent team, particularly when combined with American-style service.

Fleming developed four-unit Paul Lee's Chinese Kitchen as a moderately priced, family-style eatery. The concept, an Outback joint venture, ran into trouble due to poor sites.

Paul Fleming, meanwhile, is talking about his current ventures, including two new concepts: Blue Coral, a pricey seafood house scheduled to open in June in Newport Beach, and Paul Martin's American Bistro, a “San Francisco-style” restaurant he named after himself (Martin is his middle name) that will debut this year in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Scottsdale is ground zero for the soft-spoken entrepreneur, who began his restaurant career as a Ruth's Chris Steak House franchisee 22 years ago. It is where he launched P.F. Chang's in 1993, where he put the first of four Paul Lee's Chinese Kitchens and where Fleming Restaurant Management is headquartered. He recently named Ed Bartholemy, formerly of Mimi's Cafe, president.

Fleming, 52, re-entered the restaurant business in 2003 after retiring three years earlier to help President George W. Bush push his faith-based initiative. Chastened by Washington politics, Fleming returned to Scottsdale and created Paul Lee's. As with Fleming's Prime, he convinced Out-

back Steakhouse to invest in it. Blue Coral is another joint venture with the Tampa-based company, which sold its interest in Paul Lee's back to Fleming in January.

Developing new eateries isn't Fleming's only preoccupation; Fleming Restaurant Management is also investing in and acquiring restaurants, in particular, those with sales of less than \$10 million. It's a niche that's all but ignored by private-equity firms, he says.

Did the sudden rush of private-equity firms into the restaurant space surprise you? Or did you see it coming?

I'm more surprised at the multiples than that it's happening. But just the fact that these sophisticated companies are still buying restaurants is encouraging. They must feel good about the industry, which is always flattering. However, I think some restaurant companies are really for sale because the multiples are so high.

There are deals out there that we're not pursuing, for whatever reason—too early-stage, infrastructure isn't ready, they haven't

Conceptual



*Paul Fleming is still creating concepts,
but now he wants to buy them, too.*

Thinking

BY DAVID
FARKAS

Concept creator Paul Fleming, who has spawned a half-dozen concepts, is on the lookout for small restaurant companies with sales of less than \$10 million.



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“Japanese food is the next big thing. It’s vegetable oriented, has great flavors and is something you can eat a couple days a week.”

opened in enough cities. But [these companies] are still getting offers.

When you say “we,” are you talking about your company or a private-equity firm?

In my business now, we own our own restaurants, develop our own concepts and invest in other businesses. We also partner up with [private-equity] people like [Oak Investment Partners’] Jerry Gallagher or [Catterton Partners’] Michael Chu. But we don’t work with them daily. They have their own businesses.

Where are your interests in that mix?

[Operations] is not my forte, which may surprise people. It is really development, conceptual and targeting new investments. We have had great luck in targeting the right companies, by the way. We just haven’t been able to pay as much as some people wanted. I’d like to spend much more time on the investments and conceptual work, and have my partners do the operating.

Which restaurant companies are you interested in acquiring?

We are looking at a neat company, which I can’t mention. It’s founder-run and run very well. It’s a great value-oriented company, and what we could offer them is experience and growth, not just operations but how to build an infrastructure. They actually have a great family management team that we wouldn’t fool with. But they need development officers and maybe other things. We are not going to operate the business, however. But we expect to have voting rights and be very active on the board. Some people may equate that with operating. I don’t.

How do you perceive your role as a board member?

I think boards run businesses. A lot of peo-

ple hate that thought. Management is the board’s partner in the business, but you have to separate the two. If you are a board member, your job is to represent your shareholders—and that includes consulting and helping the management team.

Tell me about Paul Martin’s American Bistro.

We are trying to figure out how to have a Napa Valley or San Francisco sensibility about it—even from a service level. If you go to good restaurants in San Francisco, for example, it is very bohemian. Servers have tattoos and piercings, and yet it’s professional service and better service than you find in most of the country. You let people be themselves without being ridiculous. You just hire the best people. You don’t judge them. And you don’t have them be generic.

[Paul Martin’s] will be a combined \$15 check average—lunch and dinner. Maybe \$12 for lunch and \$18 to \$20 at night. We will buy organic, free-range chicken, grass-fed beef, line-caught salmon, artisan cheeses and Tamales Bay oysters. The lease is almost signed.

Will it feature display cooking like some of your other restaurants?

I don’t think so. I’m not that big on open kitchens anymore. I am going away from them. The only thing good about open kitchens is you can see how clean your restaurant is. We are creating something, maybe, a little quieter and a little cozier.



“Having venture-capital partners has been a hugely positive influence. They taught us how to act like a public company.”

BIOGRAPHY

Name: Paul M. Fleming
Hometown: New Iberia, La.

Education: bachelor's degree in criminal justice, 1976, Loyola University (New Orleans)

Current Position: owner and founder, Fleming Restaurant Management, Scottsdale, Ariz.

Ladder-Climbing: founded, co-founded or founding partner of Paul Martin's American Bistro, 2005; Blue Coral Seafood & Spirits, 2004; Paul Lee's Chinese Kitchen, 2004; Pei Wei Asian Diner, 2000; Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar, 1998; P.F. Chang's China Bistro, 1993; and Z' Tejas Southwestern Grill, 1989

Hobbies: wine, food, boating, reading, charity, running

Recent Reading: *Marley & Me* by John Grogan and *The Plot Against America* by Philip Roth

Personal: married for 25 years; two children, ages 23 and 22

Even though we want to have 60 wines by the glass, we won't have a huge bar scene. Really, that's what I have been my whole life. I am a food guy, not a bar guy.

And then there's the Outback joint-venture Blue Coral, set to open here on Fashion Island in June. What's been the thought process?

Outback and I like the dinner-house business. We wanted to have an alternative to Fleming's and something that didn't compete with Roy's or Fleming's. More than that, Bill [Allen, Outback CEO] and I like the seafood category, particularly the high end of it. So we want [Blue Coral] to be the alternative to Fleming's at night in the \$35 to \$50 range.

Why that range, and why seafood?

Well, we don't want to compete with Bonefish Grill, and the seafood category hasn't been consolidated the way other dinner-house restaurants have been. That's not conjecture. Throughout the country, [the category] is all independent owned. The intent is to open two, here and in La Jolla, and do it right.

How did you structure the deal with Outback?

The deal on Blue Coral is they own 75 percent and I own 25 percent, and we both put up our own money. We don't expect them to carry us. But they are such fabulous partners and offer us such leverage in anything we do—even culturally—that I want to be in business with them.

What kind of time does Outback devote to the project?

It's a big priority for them to develop these brands properly. [Outback founder and former CEO] Chris [Sullivan] and I and Bill work closely on these things. It is watched closely from the top and developed with the founders of the company. They've done that with all their concepts.

And then there's Paul Lee's Chinese Kitchen.

Paul Lee's was intended to be a Chili's with Chinese food. It's not in the P.F. Chang's category, and it wasn't meant to be a competitor. We are having moderate success. We are trying to figure it out, to tell you the truth.

What were you trying to do with it? What niche is it supposed to fill?

It was meant to be right between P.F. Chang's and Pei Wei Asian Diner. More of a family-style, neighborhood place without big alcohol sales but with big lunch and dinner business. When we started it, we changed it to a dinner-only, and that model doesn't work. So we're doing good people counts, but our check averages are not real high.

Is there a solution?

We are trying to get [Paul Lee's into] higher profile sites, more like Chili's and Olive Garden, and to be more family oriented. We went into neighborhood deals thinking



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“We have to get to a point where [the industry] is hiring more racially balanced and interesting people.”

we would do just dinner business.

Are there issues on the menu side?

We started with an odd menu: curry sauces and all kinds of wild-ass dishes. And we wanted to be completely different from *all* Chinese restaurants in America. And what we found is the things that sell at mom-and-pop Chinese restaurants

are the things that sell at all Chinese restaurants. In other words, Mongolians, sweet and sour, dumplings. So we consolidated the menu back to what people eat.

Are you saying you don't have to look for a competitive point of difference with the menu?

We do. Our competitive point was it's value-driven. It's much less expensive than P.F. Chang's. Paul Lee's wasn't meant to be bar driven.

So food wasn't the issue?

We have had great food comments. There is something else, image-wise or location-wise. Head counts are very good, but people just stop, eat and get out. They don't take their time and don't have beer or wine. They are buying just what they want. We wish they were buying beer and wine. Casual-theme restaurants, in general, have much higher beer and wine sales than we do.

How old is the concept?

Just a year old. We did four in a year (laughs). So we will do one more this year, and we'll be changing the prototype. We have two out in Phoenix and one in Las Vegas and one 3,000 miles away in Tampa. And it is just too hard on us to operate it

from Phoenix. So we are selling the one in Tampa to Carrabba's [a division of Outback]. But the other three we are going to operate and see what we can do with it.

For all your successes, Paul, has this concept really tested your business skills?

It's been tough because expectations are high. I know we are going to figure it out, and we'll open another one this year. But it is sensitive and tough because I didn't want to compete with my former partners [at P.F. Chang's]. At the same time, I have a responsibility to Outback and want to be successful for them. That's a pretty fine line.

What do you see your skill set being today?


Clearly, what I like to do today is conceptual work. But I think I've matured enough that I take shareholder responsibilities very seriously. I think I represent the people who invest in our business real well. Which is a huge leap from where I came. From just being a [Ruth's Chris Steak House] franchisee and then a conceptual person, I've matured into somebody you can trust. Maybe it's not the most important thing you can do right now, as far as creating jobs goes. But at least I'm representing people well.

How do you see your own job evolving?

More than anything I've done in the last 22 years, I like what I am doing now. I like having a high-profile, smart partner. Ed [Bartholemy] helps identify investments and runs the business.

I stay active at conceptualization. Last year has been one of the most fun years I've had in a while. Even with the struggles, it's a neat position to be in. **CL**

To read more about Paul Fleming's take on working with venture-capital partners, go to www.chainleader.com.



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SNAPSHOT

CONCEPT

The Melting Pot

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100

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SYSTEMWIDE SALES

\$162 million

AVERAGE CHECK

\$45 to \$55

EXPANSION PLANS

25 in 2006

TRAIN

the Trainers

At The Melting Pot, food safety depends on servers educating their customers.

BY MARY BOLTZ CHAPMAN

The Melting Pot servers instruct customers on how long to cook each ingredient to ensure it's safe to eat.



The Melting Pot has a unique food-safety challenge: It serves raw food to its guests. The Tampa, Fla.-based chain of 100 fondue restaurants confronts that challenge with its servers, its first line of defense.

Waiters and waitresses coach customers about how long to cook the meats and vegetables in hot pots of oil or broth. They check in often over the two- or even three-hour meal, to make sure guests know the importance of not touching their plate with raw chicken, for example, and cooking their beef for at least 90 seconds.

"Our system is very unique in that our guest is dealing with uncooked product. So we certainly have to include a lot of those types of warnings within the conversation between the staff and the guest," explains Vice President of Franchise Operations Dick Sveum.

Culture Club

That requires a strong culture and a lot of training. "We hold certain principles very dear. One of those is to train our staff to feel that they are part of our system, understand our system, that they have a big role to play in our system," he says. "We are a celebration destination. People come to us for a dining experience as opposed to just a meal. If we're to have success at that, then our staff has to be primed and ready to be part of that celebration and really add to that experience instead of just serve food. That starts with a good, strong culture."

Front-of-the-house staff must pass extensive training with high marks, and much of that centers around food safety. At daily preshift meetings, education on how to help the customer prepare their food properly is a regular topic.

To ensure that servers are up to speed, The Melting Pot uses a third-party mystery-dining service. Employees who are not executing properly must return to training and have to pass before they're allowed back on the floor.

The company's Training Champion program, launched in 2003, assigns one or two people in each unit to make sure the training standards are in place and are being upheld. The representatives receive special training and certification, and gather for an annual meeting and regional "training circles."

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Food safety is addressed at The Melting Pot's daily shift meetings and franchisee conferences.

The back-of-the-house employees also receive stringent training. Workers follow HACCP procedures, using color-coded cutting boards and taking and recording temperatures frequently.

Franchise Management

Franchisees, who operate 95 percent of the chain's units, are also in the loop. A team of franchise business consultants visits units regularly, evaluating and assisting franchise owners. "Some of the evaluations we do are centered on quality of product coming in the back door, making sure that it meets the freshness standards that we've set. And that it's handled properly from the time it's received at the proper temperatures, and how it's handled...all the way through to the front of the house to the guest."

Franchisees also gather for regional meetings and an annual conference, where food safety is always on the agenda.



Sveum says The Melting Pot has been lucky when it comes to food-safety problems. "But that luck stems from continual training, being very focused and concerned about food safety both in front of the house and the back of the house," he adds.

The company's next food-safety challenge is finding an executive to control it. "We recently lost the person in charge of food safety and quality," Sveum says. "We're recruiting for that position right now, looking for someone who's got a very strong background in operations. That's a person who is going to spend a lot of time in the restaurants challenging our procedures and policies that we've got in place right now, and really researching them and researching the industry to be certain we are doing it the best that we can." **CL**



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Losing Ground

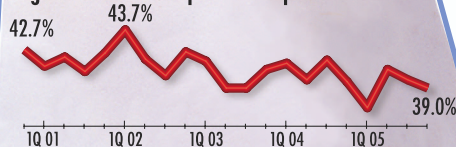
It's still the king of QSRs, but the hamburger segment continues to lose share.

BY MARY BOLTZ CHAPMAN

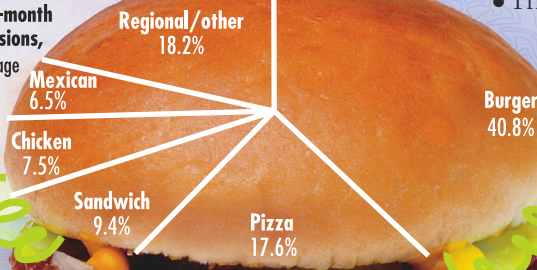
National hamburger chains comprise 40.8 percent of all quick-service restaurant users' past-month purchase occasions, a 21-quarter average reveals. But their share continues to shrink, reaching the lowest point (37.1 percent) in 2005's first quarter, according to the quarterly Quick-Track survey by Sandelman & Associates, a San Clemente, Calif.-based research firm. In first-quarter 1995, when Sandelman began Quick-Track,

Shrinking Share

Burger chains' share of past-month purchase occasions



Share of past-month purchase occasions, 21-quarter average



burgers boasted 50.7 percent of past-month purchases, and 35.0 percent of fast-food customers ordered a burger on their last purchase occasion. In fourth-quarter 2005, 25.1 percent of all QSR users had a burger on their most recent occasion.

- Burger chains saw 65.7 percent of past-month breakfast occasions, 43.6 percent of lunch occasions, and 54.0 percent of snack occasions, but only 29.5 percent of past-month dinner occasions, according to a 21-quarter average.

- 54.0 percent of fast-food customers who ordered a hamburger on their last visit did so at lunch, according to a 21-quarter average; 41.9 percent of all occasions were at lunch. 39.6 percent of respondents who had a burger did so at dinner; the evening meal comprised 41.5 percent of all occasions.

- Of those who bought a burger on their last occasion, 72.6 percent also had fries. 86.5 percent of them had a beverage.

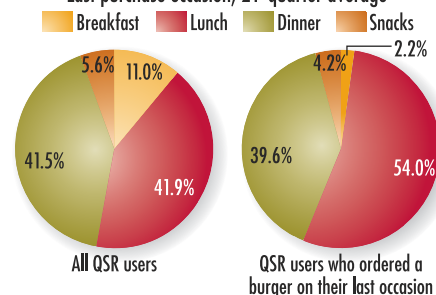
- 48.3 percent of fast-food users who bought a burger on their last occasion used the drive-thru, 30.6 percent ate in the restaurant, and 19.3 percent used carryout, according to a 21-quarter average. Of all user occasions, 40.4 percent were drive-thru, 29.6 percent were eat-in, and 23.2 percent were carryout.

- The average amount spent per person was smaller for those who ordered burgers on their last QSR visit: \$4.20 vs. \$4.74 for all customers.

- Only 13.5 percent of fast-food customers having a hamburger on their most recent occasion

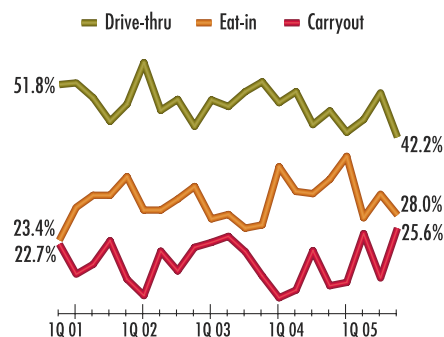
Lunch Special

Last purchase occasion, 21-quarter average



On the Road

All QSR users who ordered a burger on their last occasion



used a special deal or promotion; 21.8 percent of all users did.

- Those having hamburgers were more likely than all fast-food users to be alone (34.1 percent vs. 27.2 percent) and less apt to be dining with their spouse (23.7 percent vs. 30.4 percent).

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 burger users" as those who have purchased a burger from a quick-service restaurant at least twice in the past month. Most-recent purchase data is based on all QSR users who purchased a burger on their last QSR occasion.

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Franchise Developer

Getting a Second Brand Up and Running

Choosing a second franchise concept is like choosing a stock, says Bill Campion, executive vice president and chief people officer, Thomas & King. "Buy something you understand because you're going to have to run it," he advises. "The best fit is a brand that is similar but differentiated."

That's exactly what the Lexington, Ky.-based restaurant company did in selecting the full-service country Italian concept Johnny Carino's Italian to complement its core portfolio of 85 franchised Applebee's restaurants. Carino's leverages Thomas & King's 18 years of experience in casual dining while tapping into a younger customer base.

Other factors on Campion's list of do's and don'ts for operating a second brand include:

- **Stay in the segment you know.** "We tried a 24-hour concept. Our skill set didn't translate. It was a different market and a different business model. You have to do a reality check," Campion says.
- **Treat each brand separately.** "You can't really overlay best practices. Every concept has its own nuances. There is very little overlap, even in the same sector," Campion says. Centralizing back-of-the-house functions such as accounting and technology are the best places to drive efficiencies.
- **Don't skimp on marketing.** Make sure you have a dedicated marketing staff for the second concept, advises Campion. Thomas & King boosts visibility for Johnny Carino's with initiatives ranging from sample lunches for businesses to catering for fund-raisers.
- **Don't grow too fast.** "Understaffed restaurants are the scourge of this industry," Campion cautions. "You don't want to put a lot of inexperienced managers into your new brand. And you don't want

to have such thin staffing that you're working your people to death."

• **Don't forget the core brand.** "One of the biggest mistakes people make is to put all of their attention on the new brand. Make sure you're taking care of your primary brand. If that brand continues to drive the lion's share of your profits, your mistakes with the new brand won't kill the bottom line," he says.



Thomas & King selected Johnny Carino's Italian to complement its portfolio of 85 franchised Applebee's restaurants.

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Saladworks' John Scardapane takes pleasure in seeing his garden grow.

BY CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Reaping the Benefits

John Scardapane, founder and CEO of 71-unit, Conshohocken, Pa.-based Saladworks, has loved gardening for the last 25 years.

"It has a calming effect on me," the 42-year-old executive says. "I love doing the mulching, soil-planting, nurturing and feeding of my vegetables." He spends three hours on weekends tending to his vegetable garden. Although his wife, Gail, is not interested in gardening, their four children, Alexandra, 15; Anthony, 13; Isabella, 4; and Sabrina, 2, all chip in. He also helps his mother, Joan, with her indoor plants.

Learn by Doing

Scardapane grows most of the same vegetables that he uses at his tossed-to-order-salad chain, such as lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers and carrots. "By going through the growing process, I know what makes a great crop and how to select the best produce," he notes. "Gardening has helped us find the perfect farms that will produce the highest quality yield."

Scardapane also grows lots of herbs, moving them inside during the cooler months. He recently completed pruning his perennials, vines and shrubs. And he is looking forward to harvesting the last of the root vegetables: carrots, beets, garlic, onions and potatoes.

Planning Ahead

To gear up for the spring, summer and fall, Scardapane is going through numerous plant and seed catalogs. He always starts the growing season with slow-growing and cool-weather vegetables such as leeks, celery, broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage. "This way they are ready to go in the ground as early as April," he says.

By spring Scardapane starts his flowering shrubs and likes to have peas in the ground by St. Patrick's Day. In May and June, he begins planting warm-weather crops like melons and squash. His earliest tomatoes start blooming in the peak of summer. "This is my own tradition, and something I have been doing for years," he declares.

This year Scardapane wants to grow more heirloom vegetables such as Roman beans, lemon cucumbers, eggplants, Spanish Roja garlic, Bulgarian peppers, and more Lillian yellow and Brandywine tomatoes.

Nature's Bounty

While all this gardening gives him the chance to cultivate his green thumb and enjoy some fresh produce, it also provides Scardapane with a sanctuary from the hectic work week. "It is a great way for me to get my head clear, spend time with nature, enjoy fresh air, blow off steam and relieve stress," he declares. **cl**



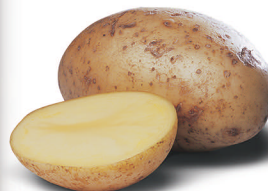
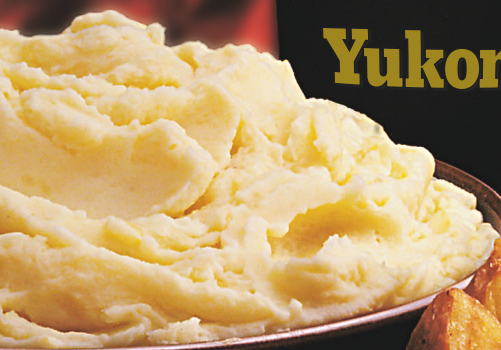
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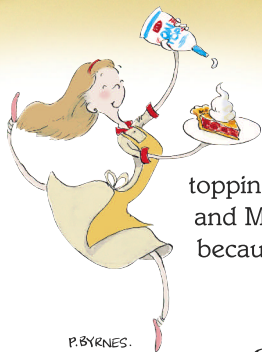
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