



January 11, 2010

Famous Dave's sells development rights for Reno, Northern California

Famous Dave's of America, Inc. has sold franchise rights for markets in Northern California and the Reno, Nev., region, a move that could expand the restaurant chain into those areas for the first time. The Minnetonka-based barbecue restaurant chain said that a franchisee called Savory Investments had bought the rights to open four restaurants in California (including the Redding and Chico markets) and Nevada (including Reno and Sparks). Famous Dave's already has 12 restaurants in California and four in Nevada. The company said Savory Investments was founded by brothers Rory and Sean O'Neal, who previously worked with companies such as Sysco Foodservice, California Cafe, Crocodile Cafe and Paragon Steakhouse. Famous Dave's is still in expansion mode, saying earlier this fall that it planned to open 13 restaurants this year (it has 177 now). Last week, it said it entered a \$5 million bid to buy nine Northeastern Famous Dave's restaurants from North Country BBQ Ventures, Inc., a New Jersey franchisee that filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

Source: Minneapolis / St. Paul Business Journal

Wendy's Burger Chain Exits Japan as Customers Queue on Sidewalk

Wendy's closed its doors in Japan after almost 30 years as queues spill onto the sidewalk at some of the hamburger chain's 71 restaurants. Wendy's/Arby's Group Inc., the third-largest U.S. fast-food restaurant company, was unable to renew a franchise agreement with Tokyo-based Zensho Co. last month. The Atlanta-based company hasn't ruled out re-entering the world's second-largest economy if it finds a suitable new partner. Sales at fast-food restaurants grew 3.1 percent in Japan last year, bucking the 0.8 percent drop in the overall dining industry, according to market researcher Fuji Keizai Co. Consumers, facing bleaker job prospects and falling wages, are seeking budget options, spurring sales for the local chains of McDonald's and KFC. "Fast-food sales do well in tough times," said Koichi Ogawa, chief portfolio manager at Daiwa SB Investments Ltd. in Tokyo. "People want to spend less on meals." Zensho said it decided not to renew the Wendy's contract to concentrate on its other chains, which include the Sukiya beef-bowl brand. "There is significant long-term potential for Wendy's/Arby's Group restaurants in Japan," Andy Skehan, a senior vice president of the company's international unit, said in a Dec. 10 statement. "We intend to pursue new development opportunities in the country with new franchisees or joint venture partners." Wendy's, Japan's seventh-largest burger chain, has been busy since the closure was announced Dec. 10, Zensho spokesman Naoki Fujita said, without providing sales data. The burger chain entered Japan in 1980 under an agreement with supermarket operator Daiei Inc. Zensho took over the franchise agreement in 2002.

Source: Bloomberg.com

Subway, Other Restaurants Try Catering to Boost Sales

The restaurant industry has decided there's only one thing left to do with so many financially strapped folks refusing to go to eat out at restaurants: bring the restaurants to them. Some of the nation's most familiar restaurant chains — from fast food's Subway to fine dining's Ruth's Chris Steak House — are pushing catering business like never before.

"It's been an abysmal year for the restaurant industry," says Melissa Wilson, principal at the research firm Technomic. Restaurants reported declining same-store sales for the 17th-consecutive month in October, reports the National Restaurant Association. Some 61% saw sales decline in October at stores open at least one year. So the race is on to find any new revenue stream — even if it changes the way a restaurant operates. "The sheer number of restaurants now with a presence in the catering space is amazing," Wilson says. Catering is a \$33 billion opportunity for the industry, she says. People may be eating out less often, Wilson says, "but there's certainly no embarrassment about bringing a restaurant platter to a potluck dinner." Even in a pinched economy, sometimes a catered meal is a necessity. In a recent survey conducted by Subway, 40% of consumers said the hardest part about having family over for the holidays is feeding them. So it's no surprise that catering is hitting all categories this holiday: •Fine dining. Ruth's Chris Steak House, which suffered a 24% drop in sales in the third quarter at company-owned units open at least one year, began to test catering in Florida and Southern California last month. It will roll the program out to about half of its 129 restaurants in 2010, says Cheryl Henry, vice president of new business. The chain will do weddings as large as 300 guests or drop off food for a home party, culinary Vice President Jim Cannon says. •Casual dining. With same-store sales down 8% for the third quarter of 2009, California Pizza Kitchen has revamped its catering menu and given it new emphasis. "It's challenging times that bring you into these things," says Larry Flax, co-CEO. It even dedicated an entire division to catering six months ago and hired a sales team and catering director, he says. •Fast-casual dining. Panera Bread has had a good year, with same-store sales up nearly 7%, but catering is helping to drive awareness of new products: cobb salads and macaroni and cheese. "The economy has shown us how much we have to go out and get the business," says Rick Vanzura, co-chief operating officer. •Fast food. Subway is giving an extra push to catering. Platters with five foot-longs (each cut in half) start at \$25. Two catering orders each day over a weekend "can mean an extra hundred bucks in sales that you wouldn't have had," says Tony Pace, who oversees Subway's consumer marketing arm. Wingstop is making a big catering push. It's focusing on large orders of 100 wings or more. Catering, says Andy Howard, chief marketing officer, could be its largest growth initiative for 2010.

Source: USA TODAY

Cold Stone Creamery Gets the Scoop on Thailand

Cold Stone Creamery has signed a 20-year agreement with Central Restaurants Group Co. Ltd. to introduce the ice cream stores in Thailand. Scottsdale-based Cold Stone and its parent company Kahala announced the master franchise agreement Thursday calling for 10 stores in the Asian country by 2014. Cold Stone's first Thailand location is expected to open in February in Bangkok's Central World shopping complex. Central Restaurants has introduced a number of U.S. quick-service concepts in Thailand, including Kentucky Fried Chicken, Mister Donut and Auntie Anne's. "CRG has 30 years of quick service restaurant experience in Thailand," said Dan Beem, Kahala's president of international. "The company's successful record of securing premier locations, driving traffic and their operations know-how makes the organization the ideal partner for Cold Stone Creamery's latest international expansion." Cold Stone's international growth began in Tokyo in 2005 and also includes locations in China, Korea, Canada, Denmark and the United Arab Emirates.

Source: Phoenix Business Journal



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Foodservice Industry Gears up for Wisconsin's Largest Trade Show

The Wisconsin Restaurant Expo will be held March 9–11 at the Midwest Airlines Center in Milwaukee. The Expo is the largest regional foodservice trade show in the Midwest. Thousands of professionals in the foodservice industry attend this event where the latest products and ideas in the industry are showcased. There will be hundreds of exhibit booths with all that's new in foodservice technology, products and services. Educational programs on a variety of management topics including employee hiring, employee management, food allergies, tips on going green, e-marketing and a series of workshops on catering topics. As always, this year's event will include: Culinary and hospitality management competitions including the college culinary competition and the ProStart® High School Invitational; The iZone highlighting the latest trends in menu items and prep styles where attendees can try it out for themselves. Demonstrations include mini sandwich concepts, exotic fruit and veggie options, bite-sized desserts, and more! The Go Green Pavilion will be featuring educational sessions on green topics and resource center offering expert advice on incorporating green initiatives in foodservice establishments. The Wisconsin Restaurant Expo attracts attendance from all segments of the foodservice and hospitality industry.

Source: The Wisconsin Restaurant Expo/Wisconsin Restaurant Association.

Pizza Inn Ranked among Nation's Top Franchise Companies

Pizza Inn ranked No. 24 in the longevity category and #225 overall in a comprehensive analysis of more than 800 franchise systems by AllBusiness.com. The rankings assessed the strengths of franchising companies based upon criteria such as Web visibility and the latest financial strength scores from Dun & Bradstreet. "We are honored to be recognized as an All Star in the franchise industry," said Charlie Morrison, CEO of Pizza Inn, Inc. "While many business owners are still finding it difficult to obtain the financing to expand their business portfolios, we are continuing to see positive signs of growth within our business." To further augment the company's growth, Pizza Inn recently launched a development incentive program to entice franchisees otherwise discouraged by the current credit market. The incentive program offers a 50 percent reduction in the initial Franchise Fee from \$25,000 to only \$12,500, a 50 percent reduction in royalties for year one from 4 percent to 2 percent and the same 50 percent reduction in royalties for year two, with years three and beyond at the standard 4 percent. Pizza Inn is seeking single and multi-unit franchisees, as well as area developers in select regions of the country. This incentive applies to new construction of U.S. buffet restaurants only.

Source: Pizza Inn/Pizza MarkePlace.com

After Tumultuous Year, New Domino's CEO to Stay the Course. Departing Pizza Chain Head Dave Brandon to Face New Challenges as U of Michigan Athletic Director

On the subject of his accession to CEO at Domino's, J. Patrick Doyle is a master of understatement. "I don't know that you're going to see any major changes for the brand between [departing CEO Dave Brandon] and I," he said. "I don't think you need to see another dramatic change at Domino's." New Domino's CEO J. Patrick Doyle says the pizza chain has had enough dramatic changes for a while. The chain last month launched a completely revamped pizza, with new recipes for both its sauce and dough, running a refreshingly honest campaign from Crispin Porter & Bogusky in which Mr. Doyle, as spokesman, frankly admits that many consumers thought the company's pizza tasted like "cardboard." The push was the culmination of a two-year-long effort to refine its recipe and is likely one of the most significant moves in the company's history, so it's arguably a good time to change horses. Domino's posted flat sales in the third quarter, when competitors were down about 2%, and its third-quarter 2009 profit of \$17.8 million was up from \$10.1 million in the third quarter of 2008. "We made a lot of tough calls in terms of expanding our menu and changing our recipe," Mr. Brandon said. "We did some bold advertising. In the last year, we've launched so many platforms. Patrick, in our domestic business, has led that and led the strategy. I don't have any belief that things will change under Patrick."

Source: AdAge.com

bd's Mongolian Grill Expands in Florida

bd's Mongolian Grill announced the restaurant chain's latest Florida expansion in the Tampa Bay area. Franchisee Darryl Thomas purchased the Lakeland, Florida, and Oldsmar, Florida, bd's locations and already began his efforts to expand the brand locally. "Restaurants that provide value will be successful, even as consumers are still pinching pennies," says Thomas of the Mongolian-style restaurant where guests create their own "Mongolian Feast" and watch as it is prepared on a large, flat grill. "With bd's Mongolian Grill, I recognized a unique opportunity to locally expand a brilliant brand that offers great food and energy to guests." Thomas' immediate goals for the restaurants include expanding food offerings such as appetizers and 2010 limited time promotions. He and his managers intend to be very involved with the Oldsmar and Lakeland communities. "Darryl brings to bd's a unique set of sales, marketing, and corporate leadership skills, which will be invaluable as he takes the reins in Florida," says Rodger Head, president and CEO of bd's Mongolian Grill. "We are thrilled that he is on board." As part of its commitment to serving the local community, bd's is kicking off 2010 by highlighting healthy eating with its "Fun, Fresh Foods" promotion that focuses on raising funds and awareness for the American Heart Association. The promotion starts January 11.

Source: QSR

Américas to Open in River Oaks Shopping Center. Chef Michael Cordúa Continues Américas Expansion with Third Location

Weingarten Realty Investors announced that award-winning restaurateur and renowned chef Michael Cordúa will open a third Américas restaurant in the River Oaks Shopping Center in the fall of 2010. Américas River Oaks Ltd. (ARO, Ltd.) will own and operate the new restaurant, which embodies the culinary contrasts that Cordúa is famous for – authentic Latin ingredients from the Americas paired with classical and contemporary culinary techniques. The River Oaks Américas will be a second-floor, 9,150-square-foot restaurant, featuring an elevated bar area and private event spaces. It will be a highlight of the newly redeveloped northwest corner of the center, located at the intersection of Shepherd and West Gray. The new venue will continue the design partnership between Cordúa and acclaimed architect Jordan Mozer, creator of some of the world's most photographed restaurants and hotels. Restaurateur and chef Michael Cordúa is a past recipient of the Robert Mondavi Award for Culinary Excellence. Américas has garnered accolades from Food & Wine, Esquire, Texas Monthly and Continental magazines. "Cordúa's restaurants are some of the most innovative and beloved in all of Houston," said Patty Bender, senior vice president for

Weingarten Realty. “We’re thrilled they have chosen to open their third Américas location at River Oaks Shopping Center.”

Source: BusinessWire/Weingarten Realty Investors

Firehouse Subs Promotes Fox to CEO

Jacksonville, Fla.-based Firehouse Subs promoted Don Fox to chief executive officer for the company. A 30-year restaurant industry veteran, Don joined Firehouse Subs in 2003 after 23 years with Burger King. In his most recent position, Fox served as chief operating officer of Firehouse of America, a subsidiary created to manage franchisee operations for the company. Firehouse Subs Founders Chris and Robin Sorensen will remain 100 percent active in the company; Robin Sorensen is now chairman of FOA. In addition, the company also plans to develop at least 50 new restaurants in 2010, including the company’s first location in Chicago as well as other locations throughout St. Louis, Mo., Oklahoma City, Okla. and Pittsburgh, Pa, and others.

Source: Foodservice Equipment & Supplies



Expansion Plans for Hot Dog Eatery

After more than 40 years in the hotdog restaurant business, Orange Tree Hot Dogs Inc. is expanding outside of the Jacksonville metropolitan area for the first time. The company’s 12th location will open at the University of Florida in Gainesville in late January. Other new locations are also expected to open in 2010 in St. Augustine, Orlando and Atlanta, according to the company’s director of franchising, Shawn Emling. Founded in 1968 by Peter and Carolyn Koppenburger and now on the third generation of family ownership, the first Orange Tree Hot Dogs location was one of the original tenants of the Regency Square Mall. The Jacksonville-based company started its franchising program in 2007 and since then has opened nine new locations in the Jacksonville area, and has created an expansion plan to open five additional locations each year. The restaurant’s menu is simple, consisting almost exclusively of hot dogs with a wide variety of toppings, many of them made with proprietary recipes. The top seller is the slaw/onion sauce dog and the average cost per meal is \$6.32. The company estimates that it sells more than 1 million hot dogs per year. Emling said he is also negotiating with prospective franchisees for Daytona, Tallahassee, Ocala and Tampa. The company’s ultimate goal, he said, is to expand throughout the Southeast.

Source: Jacksonville Business Journal

OSI Restaurant Partners Comments on Settlement with EEOC

OSI Restaurant Partners, LLC, the parent company of Outback Steakhouse, provided the following statement regarding the recently announced Consent Decree between the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and Outback Steakhouse: Outback Steakhouse does not tolerate discrimination of any kind and is committed to equal opportunity for all employees. The Consent Decree reflects the policies, procedures and systems that were developed by Outback to provide all employees the

opportunity to express interest in and be considered for promotions. The Company is pleased that the EEOC recognizes its electronic registry as an important tool to provide and track equal employment and advancement opportunities for all employees. It is important to note that the settlement includes no finding of fault on the part of Outback. The Company ultimately determined that settling the lawsuit with funds provided entirely by insurance was preferable to the cost and distraction of further litigation. In the current economic climate, the Company believes it is more important than ever to concentrate all of its financial and operational resources on serving its guests, supporting its employees, and driving its business. Liz Smith, the recently-appointed CEO of OSI, stated, "I am very pleased the Company and the EEOC have resolved this legacy issue. There is no glass ceiling at OSI, and we do not tolerate discrimination in any form. I have a profound commitment to ensuring not only equal, but very compelling and rewarding employment opportunities for all individuals and I look forward to building on the processes already in place at Outback to ensure we live up to that standard every day."

Source: OSI Restaurant Partners, LLC

Billy Goat Tavern Celebrates 75th Anniversary

The Chicago restaurant made famous by "Saturday Night Live" sketches about "cheezburgers and cheeps" is celebrating its 75th anniversary. The first Billy Goat Tavern opened in 1934 on Chicago's West Side, across from what is now the United Center. The restaurant has locations across the city and in Washington, D.C. SNL actors made the restaurant famous with sketches that parodied Billy Goat cooks, who hawk "cheezburgers" and don't serve fries, only "cheeps." According to Chicago legend, the founder of the Billy Goat is also responsible for the Chicago Cubs' World Series drought of more than a century. The owner allegedly cursed the Cubs during the 1945 World Series when they wouldn't let his pet goat into Wrigley Field.

Source: The Chicago Tribune/The Associated Press

Texas Businessman Orders New Look for Wing Zone

Wing Zone, a take-out/delivery concept hailing from Atlanta, is poised to become a take-out/delivery/dine-in concept in San Antonio. Brad Meltzer has forged a deal to deliver 10 Wing Zone stores to the San Antonio and Austin markets. Prior to Wing Zone, the Lone Star State resident was responsible for bringing the Benihana restaurant to the Alamo and Capital cities. As part of Meltzer's Wing Zone roll out, he plans to add a sit-down restaurant footprint to some of the stores. These locations will feature wait staff, beer and wine and TVs for watching weekend sports. He will add a local feel to the stores — decking them out with Spurs gear in San Antonio, and with University of Texas memorabilia in Austin. "The new store prototype offers more diversity and gives wing fans a choice to order takeout/deliver or dine in," says Matt Friedman, CEO and co-founder of Wing Zone. "We are excited about continuing to innovate our brand and keep our customers intrigued." Wing Zone was founded by Friedman and Scott back in 1991 — in an effort to bring a new taste to University of Florida students suffering from the late-night munchies. The duo began franchising the concept in 1999. There are nearly 100 Wing Zone stores to date — spread out over several states, including Florida, Texas, Colorado, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Mississippi. "Wing Zone has won the awards and the prestige that proves it's the nation's best wing concept," says Meltzer of his latest venture. "And now I'm going to take the country's best wing shop and give it a strong brand presence in South Texas." Meltzer's son, Moses Gomez, will help bring in the flavor for the San Antonio and Austin restaurants. Meltzer looks to debut his take on wings next year. "(Meltzer) will make Wing Zone a household name in San Antonio and Austin," Friedman adds. "His expertise is unmatched and will take our brand to the next level."

Source: San Antonio Business Journal

Brinker International Opens Maggiano's In Saudi Arabia. Marks the First Location Outside the US, Bringing Total Global Locations to 45

Brinker International has opened the first Maggiano's location in Saudi Arabia, which also marks the only franchised Maggiano's restaurant outside of the US. It seats 278 guests and offers multiple dining areas. The restaurant is located on Al Tahlia Street, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Maggiano's Little Italy specializes in Italian-American cuisine. Maggiano's menu features pastas, salads, prime steaks, fresh seafood, regular chef specials and specialty desserts. The opening of the Maggiano's in Saudi Arabia brings the total to 45 locations globally. The company said that the new Maggiano's is operated by Jawad Business Group. Jawad, a Brinker business partner for five years, opened the first Chili's Grill & Bar location in India this year and also franchises 10 other Chili's locations in Bahrain. John Reale, president of global business development for Brinker International, said: "Our global business development team is continuing to grow our brands and we are excited about the opportunities the Maggiano's brand will bring internationally, as well as to the Saudi Arabia market. This opening brings us closer to our goal of 500 restaurants outside the United States by 2014." Maggiano's is one of three restaurant brands in the portfolio of Dallas-based Brinker International, which runs around 1,700 restaurants in 29 countries and two territories.

Source: Food Business Review

Safety of Food at Airports Spotty

Airport restaurants packed with travelers have been cited in the past year for hundreds of food safety violations, local health department reports show. A USA TODAY review of inspection records for nearly 800 restaurants at 10 airports found items such as tuna salad and turkey sandwiches stored at dangerously warm temperatures, raw meat contaminating ready-to-eat foods, rat droppings and kitchens lacking soap for workers to wash hands. Serious violations, which can increase the risk of illness, are common. On the most recent inspections available online, 42% of 57 restaurants reviewed at the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport had at least one "critical" violation. So did 77% of 35 restaurants reviewed at Reagan National Airport. Grab-and-go coolers often don't keep sandwiches and salads cold enough to stop dangerous pathogens, reports show. "The grab-and-go sandwich problem, it's a constant battle," said David Jefferson, of the Tarrant County, Texas, health department, which inspects Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. There are 76 million cases of food-borne illnesses annually in the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates. Most aren't traced to the source and doing so is even harder with airport restaurants because customers scatter, the Food and Drug Administration's Dean Davidson said. Reuben Varghese of the Arlington County, Va., health department, said airport restaurants are similar to others: "Most people dine out all the time and do very well." The National Restaurant Association's Sue Hensley said the industry "is committed to ensuring all prepared meals are safe." Still, violations happen: • Cold food above 41 degrees. At Detroit's airport, chicken in salads was 60 degrees in a cooler Dec. 4 at the Fuddrucker's near Gate C25. Fuddrucker's in airports differ from its typical restaurants because they sell so much food from grab-and-go coolers, said spokeswoman Kelly Pascal Gould. The company is auditing airport franchise coolers. • Cross-contamination. A worker handled raw chicken, then bread without changing gloves Aug. 27 at Cibo Bistro & Wine Bar at Reagan National Airport. "I'm sure it was an isolated incident," said Chris Treloar at Cibo's management firm. • Vermin. Inspectors found rat droppings or rodent issues at least 12 times from October 2008 through March at Atlanta's airport. At JFK International Airport in New York City, at least 11 citations were issued for mice from October 2008 through August. Atlanta's airport has eliminated the rodents and uses private inspectors to supplement the health department's, spokesman John Kennedy said. New York City's health department said, "Restaurants at JFK have had relatively few problems with rodents in comparison to restaurants citywide."

Source: USA TODAY



The French Culinary Institute Announces New “Union Square Hospitality Group Restaurant Management Scholarship”

The world-renowned French Culinary Institute is pleased to announce the creation of the Union Square Hospitality Group Restaurant Management Scholarship, a full scholarship for the Restaurant Management course at The French Culinary Institute. “The scholarship with Danny Meyer’s restaurant group is a huge step toward helping people achieve their dream of attending culinary school, especially during these difficult economic times,” said Dorothy Cann Hamilton, CEO and Founder of The French Culinary Institute. “We are enormously grateful for Danny’s personal involvement.” The Union Square Hospitality Group Restaurant Management Scholarship will be awarded to one student to attend the Restaurant Management course beginning on January 27, 2010 (Wednesdays and Fridays) or January 30, 2010 (Saturdays). The full scholarship provides a unique opportunity for someone to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to open or run a restaurant. The deadline for the scholarship is January 15, 2009. In addition to the Union Square Hospitality Group Restaurant Management Scholarship, The French Culinary Institute has created six (6) Restaurant Management Scholarships that cover half the tuition of the Restaurant Management course. Each of the “half scholarships” will be awarded to prospective students enrolling in the restaurant management introduction course that begins January 27th or January 30th.

Source: The French Culinary Institute

Real Mex Restaurants Announces Upcoming CFO Separation

Real Mex Restaurants, Inc. announced that Steve Tanner, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, will be leaving the company effective February 12, 2010. The company has begun a search for a replacement. Dick Rivera, President, CEO and Chairman of Real Mex Restaurants commented, “Steve has made numerous contributions to Real Mex Restaurants over the past five years, not the least of which included the sale of the company to a new equity sponsor and refinancing of the company’s debt. I want to thank him for his efforts and hard work on behalf of the company and wish him well in his future endeavors. I also appreciate Steve’s willingness to stay on and help with the FY 2010 planning process and the completion of the year-end financial close.”

Source: Real Mex Restaurants

Au Bon Pain Opens First Cafe in India

Au Bon Pain has opened its first cafe in India. The announcement comes a year and a half after the company signed an agreement with Spencer’s Retail Ltd. to open 100 Au Bon Pain bakery cafes in India during a two-year period. Spencer’s Retail is a unit of Mumbai, India-based RPG Enterprises. Au Bon Pain said it plans to open 10 cafes in Bangalore, India, and another 40 across the Southern cities. Au Bon Pain operates cafes focusing on high-quality breakfast and lunch food, including authentic bread with no trans fat.

Source: FoodBusinessNews.net

Chuy's Taking Trademark TexMex and Funky Vibe to New Cities

Chuy's is taking its funky Tex-Mex concept with its hubcap-adorned ceilings, Elvis shrines, classic car nacho bar and green-chile dishes — to new cities in Texas and elsewhere. Over the next five years, the Austin restaurant chain plans to add six to eight corporate-owned locations a year in new Texas cities as well as out-of-state markets. "We just want to do a slow, steady growth," said Michael Hatcher, vice president of real estate and development for Chuy's. "Chuy's is very special. We want to make sure we control it, every bit of it. We want to know how the menu is being put out. It's a very successful concept, and we want to keep it that way." The expansion plans are the most aggressive to date for the chain, founded in 1982 by partners Mike Young and John Zapp, who were looking to bring Tex-Mex with a twist to Austin. Chuy's now has 17 locations, including a 5-week -old restaurant in a Nashville, Tenn., suburb and its newest one, in Waco. The plans come three years after New York-based private equity firm Goode Partners LLC infused Chuy's with the cash needed to expand and bypass the franchise route, which would have diluted its unique flavor, Hatcher said. Goode Partners now holds a majority interest in Chuy's Opco Inc., Hatcher said. The chain tried to expand once before in the 1990s with a Southern California restaurant but pulled the plug when it didn't go as planned. This time, the restaurant company has secured financial backing and the help of expansion experts to ensure it achieves its expansion goals after more than two years of planning. Chuy's hopes to develop new core markets in Nashville, Birmingham, Ala., Louisville, Ky., and Atlanta, Hatcher said. Before, "we had bitten off more than we could chew," said Hatcher, who has been with Chuy's for more than 20 years. Now, we have "revamped and done it right this time." The chain has about \$5.2 million in revenue per restaurant on an average customer bill of \$12.75, CEO Steve Hislop said. With the tough economy, sales have remained flat this year, but sales and customer traffic were up 3 percent in 2008. The chain added five restaurants this year, one each in San Antonio, Arlington, Houston and Waco. The Waco location, which opened two weeks ago, set a Chuy's record for the first two weeks of sales and drew more than 800 applications for 160 jobs. Last month, Chuy's opened its first out-of-state location — in Franklin, Tenn. , a suburb of Nashville. With the typical location hovering at 6,800 square feet, the Franklin restaurant is the chain's largest at 10,200 square feet. It also drew interest from a slew of job seekers, taking in more than 1,000 applications. The Nashville area was an ideal target to begin a "second hub" for Chuy's out of state, said Hislop, who joined the chain in 2007 to help launch the expansion plans. Hislop previously was a top executive for Nashville-based O'Charley's Inc., which has more than 230 locations in the Midwest and Southeast.

Source: statesman.com

Green Movement Good Business for Restaurants

Chefs are predicting that green restaurants will be more popular than ever in 2010, according to the National Restaurant Association's "What's Hot" survey. That means more restaurants will be crediting local farms on menus and claiming to cook sustainably. But how are consumers to know which restaurants are actually communicating core principles and which are just saying what they think customers want to hear? A handful of local restaurant owners believe that certification is part of the answer. The Cafe at Phipps Conservatory in Schenley Park and Bella Sera on the Square, Downtown, both recently received a two-star rating from the Green Restaurant Association, a Boston-based national nonprofit that has provided environmental consulting and certification to food service operations for 20 years. Eat'n Park has broken ground on a new LEED-designed location in the Waterworks Mall, near Aspinwall. Once construction is complete, it hopes to be the first Pittsburgh restaurant with this LEED certification, a designation by the Green Building Rating System. A not-so-easy choice. All three restaurants' actions emphasize that being a sustainable restaurant involves a lot more than just buying local food and recycling basic materials. The typical restaurant has a lot of barriers to following environmentally friendly practices. Large portions inevitably mean substantial waste, harsh chemicals are used to properly clean equipment and spaces, and vast quantities of cheap disposables such as paper towels and styrofoam to-go containers are used. But restaurants that want to, can make significant changes. "We decided to go after LEED certification to make a statement about our commitment to being an environmentally responsible corporation," said Kevin

O'Connell, senior vice president of marketing for the Eat'n Park Hospitality Group. The new location will be more energy efficient by using Energy Star-rated equipment, taking advantage of natural light and maximizing efficiency in heating and cooling systems. They're also using environmentally friendly and recycled construction materials. LEED certification involves the physical structure of the building, but Eat'n Park Hospitality group examines other ways to lessen its environmental impact with its EcoSteps Program. So far changes have included purchasing locally grown produce and dairy free of growth hormones, eliminating paper towels and place mats, recycling used fryer oil into biofuel and utilizing more energy-efficient light bulbs. Phipps Conservatory also had developed an extensive environmental sustainability program. When Kelly Ogrodnik, Phipps' sustainable design and programs manager, learned about the Green Restaurant Association's certification program from the Missouri Botanic Garden, which had certified their cafe, she contacted the company to learn about its requirements and standards. The association certifies restaurants based on a comprehensive evaluation of seven environmental categories, including water efficiency, sustainable furnishings and building materials, disposables, and sustainable food. Restaurants must achieve a minimum of 100 points overall, as well as a minimum of points in each category. They also must have a full-scale recycling program, be free of styrofoam and must improve their score each year to maintain certification. We've been taking all of these steps and really incorporating a lot of green strategies in our restaurant," Ms. Ogrodnik said, "We just needed them to verify it for us." The opportunity to communicate its achievements was one motivation for getting certified, she said. "We wanted to be able to showcase it to the community. We're also hoping to reach out to another area of the community, someone who looks for local organic foods but has maybe never been to the Phipps Cafe before." Although it's been around since 1990, the Green Restaurant Association has certified only 263 restaurants in the United States and Canada. Currently, it is working with 600 restaurants to help them get certified or to maintain their certification. Just as many small farms follow organic standards (or even stricter standards) but haven't chosen to spend the money and time to get certified, some restaurants, especially small, independent ones might choose to publicize their sustainable practices in other ways. Dinette in East Liberty puts its commitment to sustainability on the main page of its Web site: "Dinette ... uses only energy-efficient equipment and supplies and has implemented programs to maximize reuse and recycling." Restaurants that work toward environmental sustainability should market it to customers, but certification and communication can help customers determine whether a company is truly committed or if it is all talk and no action.

Source: Pittsburgh post-gazette.com

If you would like to have news about your company, please send all editorial contributions to Mario Schacher: marioschacher@yahoo.com

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