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Restaurant News

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Growing salad bar chain starts Canadian push

TORONTO—A salad chain that has grown from one unit in Florida in 2003 to more than 50 in five countries today and is in rapid expansion mode this year, is planning to roll out in Canada after its first unit opened in January in Toronto.

A Salad Creations unit has been opened at College Park and another three are planned for Ontario this year. A master development agreement calls for opening of 300 stores across the country, 50 of them in Toronto.

All Salad Creations units are franchised.

The company is listed at the top of *Restaurant Business* magazine's 2009 Future 50 list of fastest growing restaurant chains with $25 million to $50 million in annual sales. The list is compiled by Technomic Inc.

Brenda Bot is the Canadian master developer of the concept, which offers more than 40 toppings, 23 freshly made dressings and four types of lettuce. It also gives customers the choice of custom designing their own salads.

Bot is a firm believer in healthy eating, especially after dropping 140 pounds herself when she and her civil engineer husband Glenn decided to drop the fat in their diet and get some exercise. She divides her time between hometown Sudbury, where she has spent 25 years running Nor Eng Construction & Engineering with her husband, and Toronto where her daughter Jenna and son Justin are running the restaurant business.

Last year, she and her daughter spotted Salad Creations while vacationing in Florida. They decided it would be a good concept to bring to Canada.

Now the mother is president of Salad Creations Canada and Jenna has the title operations manager. The daughter has a philosophy degree from Queen's University in Kingston, where she started developing ambitions to become a chef.

Brother Justin is vice-president of development.

Neither mother nor children had any foodservice experience before getting involved with Salad Creations. They have done a lot of research and learned on the job.

They are planning to open a second downtown Toronto location in the Sun Life Financial building by the fall, and another this year in Erin Mills Town Centre in Mississauga, as well as one in Bramalea City Centre in Brampton.

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Differences in Canadian menu for Salad Creations restaurants

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Currrently Bot is negotiating with a potential area developer in Alberta. After the chain is set up in that province, major centres across Canada are to follow.

Units average 1,500 square feet and seat 30. The Toronto Store is 2,000 square feet but it is a training site.

Salad Creations restaurants all do catering and delivery.

Salads come in two sizes, the smaller bowls ranging in price from $5.99 to $9.99 and a larger ones from $6.99 to $10.99. For the "create your own" bowls, the price is $7.99 for a salad with any oof the 40 toppings, and $5.99 for one with up to four toppings. Wraps range in price from $6.99 to $9.99.

There are also soups and cookies.

Menu items offer some interesting culinary experiences, creations such as Chinese Chopstick, Wild Alaskan Salmon and Spicy Buffalo Chicken. The most popular salad on the special summer menu in Toronto is strawberry and roasted vegetables.

Food at Salad Creations—(clockwise from top left) spinach, orange and almond salad; strawberry and roasted veg salad (large bowl), on summer salads menu; almond cucumber dill wrap, on summer salads menu.

Brenda Bot was running a construction firm with her husband when she decided to go into the restaurant business.

The Bots have developed a Canadian supply chain and use local food as much as possible, with menus changing seasonally. Jenna has developed menu items unique to Canada, such as Canadian Cobb salad and a roasted vegetable wrap.

In an interview with *ORN*, Brenda Bot emphasized the environmental aspect of her operation. The bowls in which the salads are served are re-usable, cutlery is metal, and biodegradable materials are used.

The chain also has a special way of selecting people. Before it will take anyone on staff, it wants to see into their head. If you apply for a job—or a franchise—with Salad Creations you must submit to special psychological testing developed by head office in the United States. Candidates fill out a questionnaire, then they do a timed building block test to see how they perform under pressure, and finally there is an interview where they answer questions that are designed to determine how they will perform on the job.

The system seems to work. When staff were hired for the Toronto store to staff it at the January opening, they were all tested. Later the tests were bypassed when bodies were needed in a hurry. The result, said Bot, is that the employees who were tested are still there, and the ones who weren't are gone.

She and her children took the tests, she said.

"You learn things about yourself."

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