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Brenda Bot, President of Salad Creations Canada

Fresh and Fabulous

Healthy alternative to fast food launches across Canada

Brenda Bot wasn't looking to start a new business, but when her daughter told her about Salad Creations she was intrigued. It started in 2003, and with over 50 locations in the United States by 2008, Salad Creations was a burgeoning enterprise.

Salad Creations is a fast, casual counter-service restaurant specializing in salads made to customer specifications by a personal salad chef. With more than 40 ingredients there is something for everyone. The chain also offers soups, featured salads in two sizes and ten unique wrap sandwiches. Paninis are being tested for rollout.

"I wasn't looking at anything to do with the food business but I noted that it was an interesting concept," says Bot, President of Salad Creations Canada. "Shortly thereafter, we began discussions and I thought it would be a good concept to bring to Toronto. Ultimately, we bought the rights for Ontario, thinking we would operate like a 51st state and bring the existing domestic supply chain here."

To introduce the new chain to Canada, Bot felt it was important to launch in Toronto. "We had to start it as a flagship to a country so I knew we had to start it in a large city," says Bot. "Then we started to look into procuring a whole domestic supply chain in Canada."

The first hurdle was discovering that bringing the U.S. domestic supply chain across the border wasn't feasible. Food costs in Canada are approximately 20 percent higher than in the United States. Keep-

ing costs under control to hit the price point needed was also a major hurdle along the way.

Ultimately, creating a supply chain led to further customization targeted to the specific tastes—both in aesthetics and palate—of Canadian consumers.

Once Bot had her supply chain secured, she had to find the perfect location to launch. Landlords wanted to sample the product—and felt the branded materials were outdated and wrong for the Canadian market. "We brought an expert in to do the Canadian rebranding and I finalized my deal to purchase rights for franchising throughout Canada in December 2008," says Bot.

On January 19, 2009, Salad Creations Canada opened its first store on Young Street in Toronto. "We had our official grand opening on April 2 and we served 837 salads that day," says Bot. "The store has done really well." Another three stores will open in 2009 under Bot's direction.

"I came into this by being an area developer for Ontario with a planned rollout of 50 stores over the next 10 years," says Bot. "Now that I own the brand for Canada, we have a goal to roll out 300 stores in 10 years but the plan is still to work the brand from the core of Toronto outwards and sell area development territories across the country."

There were numerous hurdles to get the Canadian brand and the supply chain where it is today—and the company has already been recog-

Salad Creations restaurant



nized with two Frankie Awards from the Canadian Franchise Association. And now Bot is undertaking the process of finding qualified franchisees.

Requirements for franchisees are stringent. "Salad Creations Canada is about an entire experience, from the minute you walk in the door until the time you leave—and bringing on franchisees and meshing them with the brand is a challenge," says Bot.

AN EAR TO THE GROUND

Salad Creations Canada has implemented numerous sustainable and green efforts. They use washable bowls and metal cutlery, for example, instead of disposables. At first, the company used Styrofoam bowls for soup but then switched to paper for to-go orders.

"One of my mission statements as a brand is to be as environmentally conscious as possible," says Bot. "In the same way that a healthier concept like Salad Creations is here to stay, I believe that environmental consciousness is not going away. It's an important element. With the healthier choices, we're affecting an untapped market and creating a new one. It's the wave of the future."

Bot's enthusiasm sets the tone for the entire company. "I have a passion for all I do and most people can see that in how I execute my duties," she says. "I'm very hands-on in my management style and I like to interact with guests and find out if there's anything we can do to make their experience better."

Listening to guests—as well as employees and franchisees—is a key component in moving the organization forward for Bot. "It's not always possible to implement every single thing that is suggested but at least you make sure you hear what they have to say."

There is a three-step screening process for potential new hires at Salad Creations. It's a program that's meant to highlight a potential employee's strengths and weaknesses—and it's a program that allows managers to understand what kind of employee they have, such as ones with shy, loyal or outgoing personalities. This allows managers to aid employees in developing their potential in every area without forsaking what makes them a unique individual.

Finding an unusual angle and following through is something that Bot does with regularity. "I think that the key factor in our success so far—and I believe this is true no matter the business—is that we're providing something that's not typical. Our guests come in and the experience they get from us is not what they will get anywhere else."

For Bot, it's about understanding that her customers have choices—and being grateful that they choose your business. "When people make the choice to come to you that day, they need to be thanked for that choice. There are a lot of other choices out there but they made the choice to come to Salad Creations."

Indeed, the first location already boasts a roster of regulars that understand there is an alternative to unhealthy—and unfriendly—fast food experiences.

"The response has been incredible," says Bot. "I wanted to create a non-typical quick-service restaurant and I believe we've been successful in doing that." 🌱

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