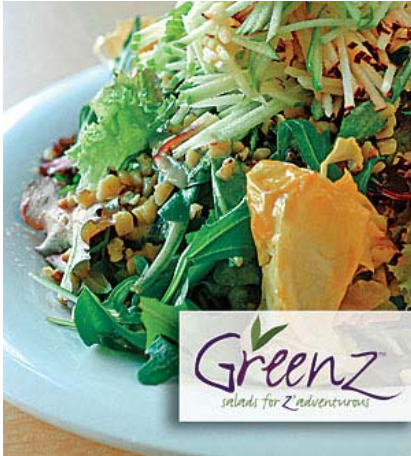


Feb 2, 2006

Ones to Watch

By Sabrina Davis

Greenz



One of the hottest trends in fast-casual dining since fresh-Mex is the salad concept. Think Raving Brand's Doc Green's. In Dallas, Texas, the trend has spawned three emerging concepts, Snappy Salads, Tossed—and Greenz.

"There's room for us all," says Jennifer Huval, Greenz cofounder and CEO. "More players will help people see salad as a segment, and we all are going to prosper."

And, says Huval, the ingredients and presentation at Greenz set the chain apart from its competition. "Tossed is more focused on getting people in and out," Greenz co-founder and president Casie Caldwell explains. "We want our customers to have an experience."

Specifically, Huval points to Greenz's upscale atmosphere—muted green and purple walls, salad-inspired art, down-tempo music, counter ordering, table service—and delicious salad ensembles. "We encourage our managers and staff to interact with the customers, offer refills, and give a full-service experience," Caldwell says.

The Greenz menu includes 12 salads; all can be wrapped in a tortilla. The top-selling vegetarian salad is the Warm Pear and Goat Cheese, made with mixed greens, poached pears, goat cheese, strawberries, candied pecans, and apple-chamomile-honey vinaigrette. Among meat-lovers, the Chipotle Chicken—shredded chicken, tomatoes, jack cheese, toasted pecans, chipotle cream dressing, and tortilla strips—is a favorite. Prices range from \$6.95–\$9.95.

Appetizers are also available. Side orders like Brie pastries and Spinach Pinwheels, as well as beer and wine sales, help drive the average per-person ticket to \$10–\$11. For the kids, there's the Little Sprout's Meal of chicken tenders and a small fruit cup or salad.

Huval and Caldwell met as colleagues in an e-business consulting group. "When the dot-com bubble burst, we wanted to develop something we were passionate about," Caldwell says. "We saw success in the fast-casual industry and saw an opportunity in focusing on one item."

Caldwell's marketing background and Huval's project management expertise made it possible for Greenz to showcase a veteran, big-brand look at just 21-months old. "Given our backgrounds, we treat everything as a project with hard and fast deadlines and expected outcomes," Huval says.

The chain's two corporate stores serve roughly 200 customers a day, Monday through Saturday, 11 a.m.–9 p.m. Happy hours that feature live music, \$2 appetizers, and beer and wine help boost sales, and, catering is also a growing part of the business.

The two stores are located in residential/ retail centers with parking limitations, but future locations are planned for prime retail spots to overcome that problem.

The strategy moving forward will be measured corporate growth focused in Dallas/Fort Worth and then in Houston and Austin, for a total of 10 units by 2008. Greenz is not currently offering franchises, but Huval and Caldwell say they are not opposed to the idea. They currently have no plans to franchise but say they may consider that route later.

“We try not to get caught up in the emotions that often go along with restaurants,” Caldwell says. “We’re treating this purely as a business and will grow it that way. We often get asked, ‘How do you like working in the restaurant business,’ to which I say, ‘Oh, yeah, it is a restaurant.’”

WHY IT BEARS WATCHING: In the case of Greenz, there’s no question which came first, the food or the business plan. Casie Caldwell and Jennifer Huval are savvy, educated businesswomen who happen to be best friends who share an entrepreneurial spirit. In planning their business, research and personal interests led them to food, then a single-item concept, and then salads. An upscale, trendy brand was born, and tasty, good-looking food was created to complete the equation.

“When we first pitched our idea to consultants, they thought it was out there, that there was no way people going to lunch in groups would all agree to have a salad,” Caldwell recalls. “But we have offerings for die-hard vegetarians and meat-eaters alike.”

And Greenz does not stereotype its customers. “You’ll have this football-player-looking guy come in and order the Warm Pear and Goat Cheese, and plenty of women order double steak on their salads.”

Caldwell and Huval still work at every job in their restaurants on a regular basis to stay current with customers and employees. They are in tune with the industry and focused on making their concept more efficient and replicable. The equation works. Though the duo say they’re not emotionally attached to Greenz, they’re definitely passionate about their brand. Most importantly, they’ve educated themselves on the business behind restaurants.

“This is exciting,” Caldwell says. “Not only are we women entrepreneurs, but we’re doing something nobody has done in quite this way, with little to no restaurant experience, and we’re in the game.”

Greenz

CEO: Jennifer Huval

HQ: Dallas, Texas

Year Started: 2004

Annual Sales: Not disclosed.

Total Units: 2

Franchise Units: 0

www.greenzsalads.com