

EAST CASUAL
.com

TOP 100

2009 MOVERS & SHAKERS



2

Genghis Grill

Dallas / No. of units: 40

Twitter: @genghisgrill

Facebook: Genghis Grill



Genghis Grill president and CEO Al Bhakta saw the potential for the ethnic/Asian segment when he and his partners in The Chalak Group purchased the Dallas-based brand in 2004.

Members of The Chalak Group have been able to take Genghis Grill to the next stage of growth. The company added 14 units in 2009 — a 70 percent rate of growth for the

Mongolian stir-fry concept. That brings its total to 40 stores in 11 states. In 2010, the company hopes to open 20 more, Bhakta said.

“(The market) needed someone who has a good concept to grab that business,” Bhakta said. “We’ve grown every year so we feel we made a good choice.”

The concept’s rise also helped propel the brand to No. 2 this year, up from Fast Casual’s Fab 50 listing in 2008, the “ones to watch” segment of the annual

Top 100.

Customers like the “Build your own bowl” experience in which they can choose their protein, seasonings, vegetables, sauce and starch — then have their fresh-cooked meal brought to the table. The brand’s loyal fans also enjoy posting their favorite bowl choices on the Genghis Grill’s Facebook fan page. Genghis also courts to-go orders with its online ordering.

— Christa Hoyland

Beautiful Brands

Tulsa, Okla. / No. of concepts: 14

3

Beautiful Brands International (BBI) earns a spot in Fast Casual’s Top 10 because the company continues to make smart moves in building its franchise portfolio. In 2009, the company added 10 concepts to its fold that range from fast casual salad to

casual comfort food, including Greenz, The Crusty Croissant, Sonny Bryan’s Smokehouse, Kyro Pizza and In the Raw.

The company also is developing three other concepts into franchise chains, including company-owned Rex’s Chicken, a legendary eatery in Tulsa; St. Michael’s Alley, a Palo Alto, Calif., casual bistro; and Le Beau Rouleau, a crepe concept.

The concepts represent rock star or emerging categories in the industry and will propel the company into one of the largest franchisors in the segment, with BBI’s signature concepts, Camille’s Sidewalk Café and FreshBerry, as the role models.

BBI founders David and Camille Rutkauskas opened their first Camille’s in Tulsa in 1996, in a tiny mall-based sandwich kiosk. Now, the brand has more than 900 territories in development in 38 states and on four continents.

“The next one to three years will consist of opening new stores and continuing to bring new restaurants under the Beautiful Brands umbrella,” Rutkauskas said. “We want to be one of the leading restaurant development companies in the world. We’re definitely not going to limit ourselves. We want to grow our company, and we have the staff in place to do that.”

— V.K.



Camille's Sidewalk Café

8 Einstein Bros. Bagels

Lakewood, Colo.

No. of locations: 180+

Twitter: Einstein_Bros

Facebook: Einstein Bros. Bagels

There is a great benefit to being a bagel-and-coffee deli: You cater directly to the rushed business executive's diet.

"When dining management groups decide which brands they want in their facilities, we are increasingly becoming a top choice," said Jeff O'Neill, chief executive officer of Einstein Noah Restaurant Group Inc., the brand's parent company. "We are a strong concept for reputable organizations such as ARAMARK, Sodexo, Compass Group and AAFES because we offer quality, freshness and convenience where portability and affordability are essential."

But professionals aren't the only ones that go for this model of higher-scale food in a fast casual business model. Students love it, too, and the company has capitalized on that fact.

In the fourth quarter of 2009, Einstein Bros. Bagels opened 31 licensed locations in a variety of venues, including universities, health-care facilities, military bases and corporate headquarters. In 2010, the company plans to exceed its 2009 openings for another record year.

— J.L.



Zoup!

Southfield, Mich.

No. of locations: 24

Twitter: Zoup_Soup

Facebook: Zoup!

9

Zoup! has been around since 1998, but it didn't start gaining speed for a couple of years. In the last few, however, it has made up for lost time, at least in terms of brand recognition.

A master of differentiation, the concept has made headway with its 12 always-rotating soup varieties, each made completely from scratch, and always including at least one low-fat, vegetarian, dairy-free and spicy option. Their homemade stock is made from triple-distilled water.

The company's emphasis on consumer choice and health has made it especially popular, and the store opened three new locations in three states in 2009 — putting it at roughly 24 units at our time of publication. It has recently turned toward nontraditional locations, having opened at Airport Center in Hanover Township in August 2009.

— J.L.

10

Fast Casual Alliance

LinkedIn: Fast Casual Alliance

As the founders of the Fast Casual Alliance, we were hesitant to include the organization on our list of movers and shakers, not to mention to rank it in the top 10. But our panel was convinced the Alliance had one of the best and brightest years in 2009, and was instrumental in pushing the segment forward.

After close to three years as a small group consisting of passionate fast casual operators, the Fast Casual Alliance will reside under the NRA umbrella as the Fast Casual Alliance – An NRA Industry Council, it was announced Sept. 15. The creation of the

council fits into the NRA's new strategic initiative to better unite the restaurant industry as a whole. And it's the first industry council of its kind for the NRA.

"In a year that was highlighted by unprecedented economic conditions the Fast Casual Alliance grew and continued to spread the word about serving great food that is affordable," said FCA president Louis Basile. "I believe the overall value that our segment provides for the consumer is something very special. I am very excited about the opportunities and challenges we face together in 2010."

— V.K.

FAST CASUAL
.com

TOP
100