

# Operators eye turnover reduction via morale-boosting competitions

By Louise Kramer

A sandwich cookie that hit select Starbucks Coffee units last month is a far cry from cookies found in grocery stores or bakery-cafes.

The Starbucks item is a shortbread confection filled with maple cream and was inspired by a South American treat called *alfajor*.

What sets the cookie apart is not only its South American roots,

but how — and why — it came to market. It was created by an employee for Starbucks' New York region cooking contest. The prize is having the cookie featured in the coffeehouse chain's more than 350 stores in the multistate area.

The cookie's creator, Colleen Orbegoso, assistant manager of a Starbucks in Newton, Conn., also won \$500 toward tuition at a culinary school. Dubbed Colleen's Maple Alfajor, the treat sells for \$1.25 and will be in outlets through Nov. 8.

The recipe contest, the Seattle-

based company's first, is part of an effort to "give partners the opportunity to grow personally and professionally," said Hope Tannenbaum, marketing specialist for the New York metropolitan region. "We want to support their talent within the company and their outside talents."

Starbucks is among a growing number of restaurant companies with rah-rah efforts to improve retention by making employees feel like they matter beyond their ability to whip up a cappuccino.

(See **OPERATORS**, page 24)



Dinosaur Bar-b-que in New York's Harlem neighborhood opened at 131st Street in December 2004 and soon will be joined by neighboring restaurants.

SONYA MOORE

## Harlem experiencing a restaurant renaissance

By Sonya Moore

NEW YORK — With abandoned warehouses scattered throughout and the Riverside Drive viaduct suspended above, a multiblock area along 12th Avenue here in West Harlem hardly seems like the home of a trendy new restaurant row.

Nevertheless, restaurateurs are hoping that ongoing development plans will help turn this Upper West Side neighborhood into Manhattan's next dining destination.

Columbia University's plans to expand its campus and the city's efforts to develop the Harlem Piers between 125th and 135th streets are expected to breathe new life into the area, operators say. Syracuse, N.Y.-based Dinosaur

Bar-b-que launched its New York location at 131st Street between 12th Avenue and Broadway in December 2004, and other restaurants are expecting to open in the near future.

"I knew that the area was developing into the next Meatpacking District," said Erik Ceres, co-owner of Alma Thai Latin Cuisine, which will be one of three restaurants opening in a two-story former freight house at 12th Avenue and 135th Street. Besides Alma, the building also will house a duplex pizzeria and bar and a third, as-yet-undetermined restaurant.

Ceres said Columbia has plans to develop buildings in the (See **HARLEM**, page 72)



Colleen Orbegoso, assistant manager of a Starbucks in Newton, Conn., won a company recipe contest with "Colleen's Maple Alfajor," a \$1.25 treat that reflects a growing trend to cultivate workers' creativity in bids to reduce turnover.

# Papa Gino's updates name and image to boost dine-in sales

By Gregg Cebzynski

DEDHAM, MASS. — Papa Gino's is now Papa Gino's Pizzeria, a name change that accompanies a new store design, tagline and ad campaign as the 163-unit chain pushes to increase dine-in business at lunch and dinner.

The chain also has added a new employee position, a "servizio," an Italian word meaning service, "whose role is to make people who are dining-in happier," said Michael McManama, senior vice president of brand development for Papa Gino's Pizzeria and sibling chain D'Angelo Grilled Sandwiches, both owned by Papa Gino's Holding Corp.

These moves, plus a more aggressive new-product program, are intended to make the 45-year-old chain more comfortable for customers to dine in and reconnect the brand with its Italian-cuisine roots, McManama said.

Since its founding in 1961, the Dedham-based chain was known simply as Papa Gino's. Adding "pizzeria" to the logo evokes the image of a comfortable place with "fun and great pizza and other Italian food," he said.

To reinforce that image, all advertising for the chain will carry the new tagline: "The family pizzeria since 1961."



Dedham, Mass.-based Papa Gino's added "pizzeria" to its logo to evoke the image of a fun, comfortable place with great pizza and Italian food.

Private-equity firm Bunker Hill Capital LP of Boston in March 2005 acquired controlling interest in Papa Gino's Holding Corp. in a leveraged buyout from former majority

owner BancBoston Capital.

A key element in increasing dine-in business is the new store design, which was unveiled in August in Shrewsbury, Mass. The

store has expanded seating with more comfortable booths than before, warmer colors, and tables and chairs designed to give the restaurant a "bistro feel," McManama said.

"We hadn't done anything new or fresh in many years," he said.

Papa Gino's plans to open five to seven newly designed stores by the time the current fiscal year ends in February 2007. System-wide sales for the last fiscal year were \$145.1 million.

The redesign is a result of consumer research among infrequent diners and nonusers that showed (See **PAPA**, page 16)

# Operators cheer on workers in company competitions

(Continued from page 4)

For instance, Union Square Hospitality Group in New York, operator of culinary meccas Union Square Café and the Modern at the Museum of Modern Art, last month pitted employees against each other in its second annual Barista Olympics. And Domino's Pizza held its second annual pizza-making contest, with a top prize of \$10,000, at its annual awards meeting in July.

Such efforts are not wasted, as employers worry more about retention.

According to a 2005 survey by Monster Inc. of 600 human resource professionals representing companies of different sizes in diverse industries, about 70 percent of respondents said that retention is a primary concern in their workplaces given workers' beliefs that finding new jobs will not be difficult. Furthermore, while 45 percent of respondents characterized retention as a "high or very high" challenge today, 55 percent said that they expected it to be a "high or very high" challenge in the next five years.

Will Guidar, general manager of Union Square Hospitality's museum operations, said the Barista Olympics has become his pet project — one that brings employees together socially and helps them bond.

"This is a fun team-building contest," he said. "It is the only time of year now when the whole company gets together. Its one of the things we do to liven things up."

This year's coffee event was a raucous gathering of 150

employees from among the company's restaurants. It was complete with cheering sections for each team, intensely focused competitors and judges — including Nation's Restaurant News' consumer trends editor Erica Duecy — who sipped their espressos with great intent.

Starbucks' culinary contest is a new twist on Avant Grande, a music contest the company introduced last year, in which the winner was given the opportunity to perform as the opening act at a New York City summer music festival.

The winner of the Starbucks recipe contest, Orbegoso, 29, began working for the nearly 11,800-unit coffee chain two and a half years ago after she decided to give up a sales career. Her goal was to pursue a culinary degree. When she heard about the recipe contest, she signed up immediately. The guidelines stipulated that the product had to have a maple flavor because Starbucks is highlighting maple this fall. The dish could be savory or sweet.



David Garcia, who works at the Modern, a fine-dining restaurant at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, participated in the recent Barista Olympics competition.

"For a whole weekend I struggled in my kitchen and made a mess. Then I came up with this cookie," Orbegoso said in a recent phone interview during a mid-afternoon break at her store. Orbegoso has lived in Argentina, and her husband is from Peru. She said alfajores are a common treat in both countries and are typically filled with dulce de leche, a caramel cream. Her twist, she said, was to add the maple filling.

The cookies were rolled out Aug. 28. A display sign says, "Take a taste of our partner's talent."

Orbegoso is not getting compensated for the cookie beyond the recognition and the scholarship. But she has no complaints.

"Just the fact that they are selling my pastry and it is something I created is a real honor," she said. "The whole journey of this and the excitement has just been awesome." n

lekramer@aol.com

## Q&A

### McKay: Groom ambitious workers into successful restaurant owners

Andy's Cheesesteaks, a retro-diner chain based in Mount Olive, N.C., not only fills its manager positions from within, but also cultivates franchisees from its employee ranks. The 103-unit company has been identifying and grooming store managers to become owners ever since founder and chief executive Kenney Moore sold his first store to his manager in 1992, a year after launching the concept. The company owns 24 stores and franchises the rest. Now, 28 of Andy's franchisees are owners who started out with the company as dishwashers, cooks or servers. With the help of investors, Andy's offers in-house financing to qualified restaurant managers who also are able to purchase their stores with bonuses when they meet certain performance goals. A new unit can cost around \$150,000, but Andy's, which offers quick service in a full-service setting, has an average unit volume of around \$460,000, with some stores posting \$800,000 in annual sales. The company recorded \$50 million in systemwide sales last year.

In 1994, Moore brought Dwayne McKay on board as human resources director to help train and develop potential franchisees from among its management team.

What is the advantage of making

#### employees franchisees?

These are people who have grown up with you. They've been the fry guy, they've waited tables, cooked on the grill, managed the store. They know what our work ethic is.



Dwayne McKay

#### How do you select potential franchisees?

Employees have to put their hand up and say they want to do this as a career. Then we start focusing on them: What do we need to do to get you to where you need to be to run a store? We have leadership [classes] to teach you the things you need — food orders, doing schedules, leadership roles. There is on-the-job training, and we monitor their progress.

#### You employ a lot of teenagers. How do you get them interested in becoming owners?

We talk with them about having a career. They have an opportunity, not just for an hourly job or to come in and cook for a couple hours at lunch. You can come in at the minimum and earn the maximum. We have countless stories of people who come in and earned their way up the Andy's ladder. Some started out when they were 16 years old. Some were in high school and became a manager at 19, 21. We have one owner who is 23 and is opening his fourth Andy's.

— Dina Berta

## NEWS DIGESTS

### New England Culinary Institute grows scholarship contest

MONTPELIER, VT. — The New England Culinary Institute is expanding its yearly Taste of New England Scholarship Recipe Contest to prospective students for the following school terms: December 2006, and March, June and September 2007.

The first-place winner will receive a \$10,000 scholarship to attend the institute, which is based here. The runner-up will receive a \$7,500 scholarship, and \$5,000 will be awarded to the third-place winner. Contestants must submit a recipe by Nov. 17.

The NECI, founded in 1980, has three campuses: Montpelier and Essex, both in Vermont, and Tortola, British Virgin Islands.

### Employers improve benefits to boost retention

LAND O' LAKES, FLA. — Looking to improve retention and recruiting, more than half of private and public companies responding to a recent poll have greatly enhanced the benefits they offer employees during the past six months.

JobKite.com, a job search website with offices here, found that 56 percent of the hiring managers, recruiters and human resource professionals surveyed at 263 companies have made significant improvements to employee benefits.

The survey, published online by Inside Recruiting, noted that companies were increasing benefits in the following categories:

- Medical — 88 percent of respondents said they have added health-related benefits, including life, vision, and better or expanded health care plans.
- Money — 69 percent said they have increased stock vesting, 401(k) funds, salaries relative to market averages, sign-on bonuses, quarterly bonus plans, and/or relocation packages.
- Vacation — 41 percent said they have increased the number of paid days off per year.

### Working chefs return to school for CIA/ACF certification

HYDE PARK, N.Y. — Nearly a dozen professional chefs are scheduled to take exams next month at The Culinary Institute of America here to obtain ProChef certification from the CIA and the American Culinary Federation.

In preparing for the exams, the chefs will learn about the latest trends in world cuisine and technological advances, said CIA spokesman Jay Blotcher. The three-day exam will be held Oct. 2-5 at the CIA's Hyde Park campus.

Nearly 200 chefs have obtained the certification since the CIA and the ACF launched the program three years ago.

Human resource items may be sent to Dina Berta, Nation's Restaurant News, 2266 Ivy St., Denver, CO 80207, or e-mailed to [dberta@nrrn.com](mailto:dberta@nrrn.com). Or they may be faxed to (303) 333-1867.