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After shaky Colo. start, Asian chain grows

TERIYAKI MADNESS RIDES DEMAND FOR HEALTHY FOOD, ETHNIC CHOICES

Teriyaki Madness moved its headquarters from Las Vegas to Denver in February 2014, with its then-operator eager to jump into the incubator of fast-casual restaurants that the city has proven to be.

Before long, both the company’s founder, Rod Arreola, and the lone Colorado location of the Asian-themed chain were gone.

Now, though, Teriyaki Madness is in growth mode, both locally and nationally. Current CEO and owner Michael Haith founded the Maui Wowi chain and the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry, jumped on as initial backers for Keep Colorado Commerce and Industry, and franchise incubator and development company that partnered with Arreola in 2014 before he uprooted the company.

Today, Haith oversees 33 Teriyaki Madness locations, plans to hit 50 by the end of 2016 and then plans to double that total in 2017.

Denverites may not know the 11-year-old chain well. The lone Colorado location, at 8547 E. Arapahoe Road in Greenwood Village, opened earlier this month, more than a year after the Denver store shut down.

But diners in other parts of the country are far more familiar with Teriyaki Madness. Same-store sales growth ran between 20 and 35 percent at ghost locations last year, with customers flocking to the “Seattle Teriyaki” craze that has loaded that city with protein- and rice-bowl shops and begun to spread elsewhere.

“We don’t think that this is a fad. This is a trend. People are eating healthy,” Haith said. “We have national partnerships. We have proven business models.”

The concept is fairly simple. Customers choose a protein, choose a carbohydrate and choose a sauce in most instances. Chicken teriyaki bowls and spicy chicken are the chain’s top sellers.

The expansion of Teriyaki Madness comes as Asian is the fastest-growing segment in the fast-casual market—a reflection of its often healthier menus, stores’ ability to offer options like gluten-free entrées and America’s continuing interest in ethnic foods, Haith said.

EATERY OWNERS LINE UP AGAINST MINIMUM-WAGE MEASURE

Colorado restaurateurs are leading the fight against a proposed minimum-wage hike ballot measure, saying that they will have to raise menu prices and cut staff if the measure makes it onto the statewide ballot in November and passes.

Colorado Families for a Fair Wage turned in about 200,000 signatures on July 25 to get its proposed constitutional amendment onto the ballot. The proposal would increase the current statewide minimum wage of $8.31 per hour to $12 in incremental steps by 2020, then raise it by the costs of inflation thereafter.

The Colorado Restaurant Association, along with the National Federation of Independent Business and the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry, jumped on as initial backers for Keep Colorado Working, the campaign to defeat the initiative.

Sonia Riggs, the CRA’s president and CEO, said that a 2015 survey found 89 percent of eatery operators would have to increase prices in the event of a minimum-wage hike of that size, 71 percent said they would reduce jobs and 20 percent said they would close locations.

TEATRO COMES OUT ON TOP

What is Denver’s top hotel? According to Travel + Leisure magazine, it’s Hotel Teatro, the boutique luxury facility adjacent to the Denver Performing Arts Complex.

The travel publication this month released its annual World’s Best Awards, and Colorado hotels largely were overlooked. But it also singled out one lodging venue in each of the 86 highly visited cities around the world in a special add-on in its print edition, and the 17-year-old Teatro, adjacent to the Denver Performing Arts Complex and frequented by visiting performers, nabbed the Mile High City honor from magazine readers.

“It’s always nice to be recognized for our efforts, and being recognized by our guests and the readers of Travel + Leisure makes the award that much sweeter,” general manager David Coonan said.

For more, go to bizj.us/ln8t2e.

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The age of the downtown Denver building that is home to Baur’s Restaurant and Listening Lounge, as of July 18, Baur’s is a one-year-old restaurant that is the latest iteration of similarly named eateries in the facility at 1512 Curtis Street that housed the O.P. Baur Confectionery Co. The company, famous for its homemade candy and ice cream, occupied the building until the mid-1970s, and the current restaurant is serving a Mija ice cream (vanilla with chocolate and butter toffee) that recalls a sweet treat that came from the confectionery.

PROVIDED BY TERIYAKI MADNESS

A Teriyaki Madness dining room, above, and a chicken bowl, left.

Teriyaki Madness, now in 15 states across the country, isn’t looking to grow in any particular geographic region as much as it is seeking franchisees who meld well with company goals, he said. Its coming locations will span from California to Texas to the East Coast.

The Denver area will get some of that expansion. In addition to the one franchised location here now, Haith said officials plan three company-owned restaurants and three to five new franchised stores in the region over the coming years.

He hopes the reactions from customers are similar to those he had when he first encountered the restaurant and immediately wanted to make a major investment in it. He parted ways with Arreola after the two had different thoughts about the role of franchising in the chain’s growth, he said.

“We’ve got raving fans,” Haith said. “It’s amazing how many franchise owners refer their friends and family.”