



Quick-serve burger chain focuses on sustainability

By Angie Hanson

(June 3) PORTLAND — Burgerville is taking the burger concept to a whole new tier.

A local, fresh and sustainable tier, that is.

Vancouver, Wash.-based Burgerville, a quick-serve chain with 39 locations dotting Oregon and southwest Washington, is committed to fresh, local and sustainable on its menu and in its operations.

The chain works with Oregon and Washington suppliers to source onions, berries, apples and pumpkins — among other products — and following several sustainable practices in its restaurants, said Jack Graves, chief cultural officer for Holland Inc., which owns Burgerville.

Local and fresh are principles Holland was founded upon in 1920s, when it started as a creamery. Those philosophies were adopted at Burgerville, when it first opened in 1961, and have been enhanced throughout the years, Graves said.

“Back then, doing business locally was how you did business,” Graves said of Burgerville’s inception. “And it seems those practices were kind of adhered to for years and years after that.”

Burgerville’s seasonal Walla Walla onion rings, made from Walla Walla, Wash.-grown sweet onions and only available from mid-June through mid-August, are a favorite among consumers. Other top-selling items include Oregon strawberry, raspberry and blackberry shakes, and also berry-topped sundaes and shortcake available June through September, Graves said.

The chain also serves fresh pumpkin shakes in the fall and apple slices year-round, both from local venues, Graves said.

“Our uniqueness around our menu is our seasonal menu,” Graves said. “People from around the country have called and planned vacations around our menu.”

Today, Burgerville’s emphasis on local, fresh and sustainability has become its competitive advantage over larger national-chain competitors, and those factors have facilitated the double-digit growth Burgerville’s experienced the last few years, Graves said.

BURGERVILLE’S SUSTAINABILITY

In recent years, Burgerville has focused on making its restaurants as sustainable and environmentally friendly as possible.

To meet that objective, the chain works with local, sustainable suppliers — with the help of Food Alliance recommendations — and also has implemented several sustainable programs in its operations.

“Everyone’s conscious of global warming, and the use of fossil fuels and all those things,” said Graves, whose firm has received around 30 awards for its sustainability efforts. “We asked ourselves, ‘How can we impact the community in a positive manner?’”

For starters, Burgerville is expanding its store-level recycling and composting program, in an effort to redirect 85% of its restaurant-generated waste, Graves said.

To accomplish this goal, Burgerville hopes to have all restaurants recycling and composting by mid-2008, and presently, 36 locations are recycling, and 18 are recycling and composting in the kitchen and garbage areas, he said.

The next step is to include dining-area waste in the program, and right now, three locations are being bused and sorted for composting.

The process should become simpler once Burgerville begins using compostable plastic flatware and cups, as it plans to by early June, and once consumers become educated on dining-area composting, Graves said.

Burgerville, which generates 340 tons of waste per month, is diverting nearly 50% of its waste from landfills. Burgerville expects to produce only 51 tons of waste per month after sustainability measures take full hold, Graves said.

The chain should save \$100,000 in waste removal once the program is fully established, and is saving \$60,000 now, he said.

Burgerville also allows its used cooking oil to be converted into biodiesel, which is done so by Portland-based SeQuential Biofuels, Graves said.

As of March 2006, Burgerville has been sending more than 4,400 gallons of used cooking oil to be transformed into 3,300 gallons of biodiesel a month, he said.

BIJOU CAFÉ

Local and sustainable also are two priorities at downtown Portland’s Bijou Cafe, said chef Carolyn Scovil.

The Bijou Cafe uses local produce year-round in its dishes and adapts its menu to the changing seasons, taking advantage of what’s freshest, Scovil said.

“We try to stick with seasonal and as close to local as possible, and the reason is, it’s the right thing to do,” said Scovil, whose menu can feature up to 50% local product. “We’re trying to use the freshest, best, most positive product we can get.”

The local movement, however, is nothing new to the Bijou — it’s been a priority for the past 30 years.

The Bijou, which also tries using as much organic product as possible, works with a dozen growers

during peak growing seasons to incorporate such items as greens, mushrooms, beets, apples, pears, tomatoes, potatoes, berries and fiddlehead ferns on its menu, Scovil said.

“Chefs and food are big business in Portland,” she said. “Portland has a lot to offer in terms of food. There are lots of really awesome chefs.”

[E-mail Angie Hanson](#)

© 2008 Vance Publishing Corp