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Café Yumm! owners hold steady and set to continue expansion

BY **SHERRI BURI MCDONALD**

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The Wild Rose Café and Deli tucked inside the Friendly Street Market in south Eugene was Mary Ann and Mark Beauchamp's first restaurant. Founded almost 20 years ago, it provided the start that blossomed into Café Yumm!, now a growing chain of restaurants.

The Beauchamps transplanted the Wild Rose to Fifth Street Public Market in downtown Eugene in 1993. They renamed it Café Yumm! in 1997 after realizing the meal Mary Ann often fixed for herself — a bowl of rice and beans, topped with vegetables and a homemade sauce made with canola oil, brewers yeast, almonds and other ingredients — had become more popular than anything on the Wild Rose menu. Yumm! was the exclamation many customers made after taking their first bite, the Beauchamps said.

The Beauchamps opened a second outlet in the Meridian Building in south Eugene in 2001, and a third store in Oakway Center in 2002. They closed the Fifth Street store in 2005, and then in 2007, embarked on an ambitious plan to franchise the brand, with a goal of 50 outlets by 2012.

But fuel costs spiked in late 2007. Then in early '08, commodity prices, including rice — a staple in Café Yumm!'s signature rice-and-bean bowls — “started going off the charts,” Mark Beauchamp said.

Rather than raising prices, the Beauchamps decided to sit tight, wait and watch.

Then the Great Recession set in.

“We were in a stable position,” he said. “We were in a place where we thought we could hunker down and take the time to improve on processes and systems to be ready for recovery.”

Others were hunkering down, too.

“Part of the hunkering down was people who had money were holding onto it,” Beauchamp said. “The franchise industry globally shut down because financing wasn't available.”

Café Yumm! is far from the only franchisor that had to re-think its growth plan when the credit industry hit the brakes.

Nationally, the number of retail franchises declined modestly last year, after two decades of considerable growth, said Alisa Harrison, spokeswoman with the International Franchise Association.

The association forecasts 2 percent growth in franchise establishments this year, as the economy slowly recovers.

Beauchamp said Café Yumm! franchise inquiries are starting to pick up, and credit is becoming more available. Plans call for continued expansion in the Portland area.

“We’re also getting interest from Washington State,” Beauchamp said.

Interested in healthy food

Despite the challenging economy, Café Yumm! has kept its Eugene workforce of about 90 employees. It has 190 employees systemwide. And it has managed to expand to 10 locations, up from two in 2007. Café Yumm! recently ranked 27th on Inc. Magazine’s list of fastest growing food and beverage companies in 2009 and ninth on the Portland Business Journal’s list of fastest-growing privately held companies in Oregon in 2009.

“I think our (expansion) has been very careful and slower than I had planned,” Beauchamp said. “Part of that is the recession. Some of that is finding great locations,” he said, adding that great locations and great operators are two key elements for franchise success.

Most recently, Café Yumm! has made forays into the Portland market. It opened a restaurant in June in Portland State University’s new recreation center in downtown Portland. It also has a restaurant near the Nike campus in Beaverton, four in Eugene, two in Springfield and one each in Bend and Corvallis. The Beauchamps operate all four Eugene restaurants. They own the outlets at Meridian, Oakway Center and on East Broadway as franchises. The outlet at North Delta Center is owned by Beau Delicious! International, their franchising entity. The rest of the outlets are owned by franchisees.

Both of the Beauchamps have a longstanding interest in healthful eating.

Mary Ann, 59, said that Mark, 58, was munching on a sprout sandwich back in 1972 when she met him at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks. He was a basketball player recruited from southern California.

The Beauchamps view Café Yumm! as a way to share their values and lifestyle with more people, they said.

“We wanted to serve people beautiful, delicious nourishing food — the kind of food we eat at home,” Mark Beauchamp said. “When I travel on I-5 there’s nowhere to stop and eat how I eat.”

Mary Ann, the daughter of an American Army sergeant and Japanese mother, was born in Tokyo and spent part of her childhood in Italy. She grew up eating both Japanese food and Southern American food at home and was exposed to a variety of world cuisines through other families in the military.

When she started to cook, it was second nature for her to experiment with unusual flavor combinations.

Mark came to the restaurant business with a background in management and training in the real estate industry. Locally, he worked for Jean Tate and then Windemere, until he quit in 2002 to work for Café Yumm! full-time.

Initially, the Beauchamps grew Café Yumm! by opening new outlets on their own.

Mark Beauchamp said that for years he was “in franchise denial” because he wanted to interact directly with customers. But by early 2005, “We realized we’re not going to be able to accomplish the things we wanted to accomplish opening a restaurant every four or five years,” he said.

That is when Beauchamp began talking in earnest with people who had franchised restaurants.

At the suggestion of a longtime Taco Time executive — another homegrown restaurant franchise — Beauchamp flew off to Florida for a four-day conference on franchising.

“Did I really want to go to a franchising convention? No I didn’t,” he recalled recently.

But Beauchamp said it opened his eyes to the financial significance of franchises nationwide.

“I saw the structure,” he said. “I saw the need for that — the value and the power.”

About 900,000 franchise businesses generate \$2.3 trillion in economic activity and provide more than 20 million jobs, according to study conducted for the International Franchise Association.

The decision to franchise was a turning point for the company, Beauchamp said.

“That’s really what took Café Yumm! from a small mom and pop to a larger system that’s now growing,” he said.

Mission statement is key

Beauchamp describes his job today as managing “the culture of the company and our values — (to ensure) that they live every day in our staff and our franchisees, and that we communicate those to our customers.”

The company’s mission statement and guiding principles aren’t on a shelf collecting dust, Beauchamp said. He and the rest of the executive team look to them for guidance in every decision they make.

“Everything we do comes from our mission statement,” Beauchamp said.

“If what you’re doing doesn’t fit in with this, we don’t do it,” he said, tapping the framed statement he had taken down from the wall and laid on the desk.

Among the guidelines are:

Conscientiously develop successful relationships with people who respect our values, including our customers, investors, staff, entrepreneurial partners, and vendors.

Consistently provide dynamic and innovative environments which promote a healthy lifestyle.

Enthusiastically develop and maintain a reputation for success in all that we do.

Steadfastly nurture and protect the beating heart of the Triple Bottom Line of social, environmental and economic considerations.

The development of Café Yumm! “wasn’t anything I strategized because it’s life unfolding,” Beauchamp said.

“We liken (the business) to a child,” he said. “We don’t own that child. The best we can do is protect it and guide it.”

*“We wanted to serve people beautiful,
delicious, nourishing food.”*

— MARK BEAUCHAMP, CAFÉ YUMM! CO-FOUNDER

CAFÉ YUMM!

Founded: 1997

Headquarters: 456 Charnelton St., Eugene

Owners: Beau Delicious! International, a limited liability company with less than 30 members

Locations: 10

Annual revenues: \$8.5 million systemwide

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