

NATION'S Restaurant News

THE NEWSWEEKLY OF THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY

94 • May 12, 2003

NATION'S RESTAURANT NEWS

COAST TO COAST

Casey in bid to land meal-replacement concept at airport

Menu development veteran Kathy Casey might see her Dish D'Lish-brand prepared gourmet foods take off within the next two years – literally.

Casey is a former Seattle and New York restaurant chef who is now a consultant to restaurant and packaged-food companies, cookbook author and operator of Kathy Casey Food Studios, a foodservice research and development center. She and her husband, John Casey, opened Dish D'Lish, a 620-square-foot home-meal-replacement kitchen and retail counter, last fall at the Pike Place Public Market in Seattle.

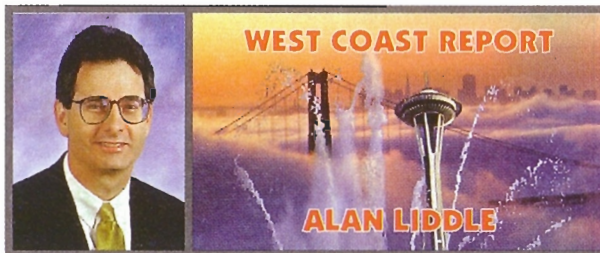
Dish D'Lish is “breaking even” as the picturesque bayfront, open-stall food market prepares to enter its busy season, Casey said.

But it is not the expectation of rising consumer traffic within the market and the potential for greater sales at Dish D'Lish that has Casey looking down the road. The object of her forward gaze is an agreement she said she has with airport concessionaire HMSHost to test a licensed Dish D'Lish at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

According to Casey, the deal is contingent on HMSHost winning a bid to manage a new terminal slated to open in 2005 and it might lead to additional airport sites. HMSHost holds the contract for existing Sea-Tac airport facilities.

“This stuff is perfect for airplanes,” Casey said of Dish D'Lish fare, such as skewers of chicken or beef “Sake Teriyaki” with scallion sticky rice and cucumber salad.

Casey said she and HMSHost see fresh-prepared gourmet foods, as well as upscale Dish D'Lish “sak”



meals, as a potentially good fit for airports. She noted that heightened security since Sept. 11, 2001, means that travelers are spending more time in terminals, and the financial woes of some airlines have prompted those carriers to reduce in-flight meal periods, test pay-to-eat programs or eliminate foodservice altogether.

The tentative airport menu, Casey said, includes the likes of a savory breakfast bread pudding with bacon and cheddar cheese, roasted vegetable and spiced couscous salad with yogurt drizzle; and Thai glass noodle salad with barbecue pork and lime leaf dressing.

Dish D'Lish sack lunches, to be priced between \$10 and \$15, might include such items as hot-smoked salmon, wasabi cream cheese, ginger-pickled onions, artisan crackers, chocolate covered berry candies and bottled water.

Though the buzz about home-meal-replacement foods has come and gone before, Casey is convinced “this is a segment of the business that is going to see intense growth during the next five years.”

“We’re going to see quick-service [options] in casual dining [operations]. I’m working with a lot of clients in this area,” she said.

Home-meal replacement hasn’t exploded yet, the chef-consultant contended, because “people are not doing it right” and prices are often too high. Many operators are not “value engineering” their ingredients list, she explained.

Dish D'Lish daily offers up to 25 menu items, including such protein entrées as meatloaf and roasted beef tenderloin with horseradish-mustard crust, and “bakes,” such as the popular “Ultimate 4 Cheese Mac.” Also sold are salads, vegetables, starches, sandwiches, appetizers, breads and desserts, including “Marionberry Overfilled Vanilla Cake.”

Per-pound prices range from \$3.99 to \$12.99, with many items selling for between \$4.99 and \$6.99 a pound.

Party packages also are sold at Dish D'Lish, as are Casey’s line of cookbooks and packaged sauces, dressings, chutneys, seasoning salts and fresh cocktail mixers.

Janice Vaughns is the chef for Dish D'Lish while John Casey is the general manager. The market-based shop is open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. six days a week during the fall and winter and seven days in the spring and summer.

“We’ve got it down to a science. We’re cooking all day,” Kathy Casey said of production in the tiny space. “We have very little waste. These dishes have a long shelf life and stay fresh tasting.”

Casey maintained that regardless of what happens with the airport deal “we’re planning on doing multiple units.” In addition, she said, “I’m working with a company to move Dish D'Lish fresh deli foods into grocery stores.”