

## **In-house bakery boosts quality for Spicy Pickle restaurants**

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DENVER — Founded in 1999 as a fast-casual restaurant serving high quality meats and fine Italian artisan bread, along with a wide choice of cheeses, Spicy Pickle is looking to help sustain its growth by establishing a central baking commissary.

The new corporate baking facility in Denver will give Spicy Pickle restaurants the opportunity to improve its baked foods and differentiate itself from other players in the bakery cafe segment, the company said. With the opening of the Crumb Rustic Bakery in January, Kevin Morrison, director of baking for Crumb Rustic, said the company is now able to control the quality of the bread it bakes and conduct research and development in a timely manner.

Mr. Morrison, who also is chief culinary officer for Spicy Pickle, and business partner Tony Walker, chief operating officer, started Spicy Pickle in Denver in 1999 after both gained experience as professional chefs. Mr. Morrison said they didn't have a mission statement or business plan in the beginning, but they knew what it took to be successful from their industry experience.

"We were chefs, so we still think how chefs think with combinations and textures and flavors," Mr. Morrison said.

Their focus was on quality food and different ingredients the average person would have at home, he said.

The company began franchising in 2003 and now has 38 restaurants open with plans for an additional 125 to be opened in the next few years. Spicy Pickle is currently in California, Oregon, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, Texas, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Mississippi, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Florida, Virginia and New York.

"As Spicy Pickle has grown, the ability to tailor its resources has grown as well," Mr. Morrison said. "Our exacting standards for breads and other baked goods will be met better than ever before by Crumb Rustic. With an in-house facility, we can ensure consistent quality for our full array of focaccia and ciabatta breads every single day."

Mr. Morrison said the concept of such a bakery was in the works for over a year. When Spicy Pickle decided to expand outside of Colorado, the original philosophy was for the restaurants to team up with a local baker and have the local baker make the bread. That proved to be easier said than done. In its first out-of-state business, Spicy Pickle had a relationship with a local baker, but the baker had staffing issues and ended up not being able to take on the account.

"Then it came out of necessity," Mr. Morrison said. "We wanted to really control the quality of service from a vendor and the quality of food and bread we were getting. Plus ... if we want to change a bread we have the ability to do it in a pretty timely manner."

Mr. Morrison said there are advantages to having baking in-house, both locally and farther away. In Colorado, it will be beneficial for research, development and quality purposes. Out-of-state, it will be beneficial to be able to go into any market with the exact same bread they have in Denver.

The Crumb Rustic Bakery is processing about 2,000 lbs of dough a day with all the bread being formed by hand without dough dividers. The main output is rosemary focaccia and white and honey-wheat with oats ciabatta bread. There are also chocolate chip cookies and a product called "chippers," which are cookie treats with chocolate chips, granola, walnuts and almonds.

"As the foundation of any great sandwich, Spicy Pickle's bread is an essential element of our success," Mr. Morrison said. "For all of our famous exotic meats and toppings, everyone comments on the quality of our breads. We're incredibly excited to be able to take this process in-house and control every step."

Overall, Mr. Morrison said the mix on the menu and variety sets Spicy Pickle apart from other bakery cafe chains.

"It's the quality of the food we put out and our attention to customer service," Mr. Morrison said. "We are probably just a little bit more expensive than some of our competitors, but it's our whole philosophy to give the customer a reason to return and that's what we do with the food and service."

Crumb Rustic Bakery is currently serving 19 Spicy Pickle restaurants in Colorado, but the company hopes to sell goods to the public in the future through retail. While Crumb Rustic is the largest bakery Spicy Pickle has, some restaurants have very small in-house bakeries. Mr. Morrison said there aren't firm expansion plans at the moment and the company wants to concentrate on service and quality for the Colorado Spicy Pickle restaurants.