

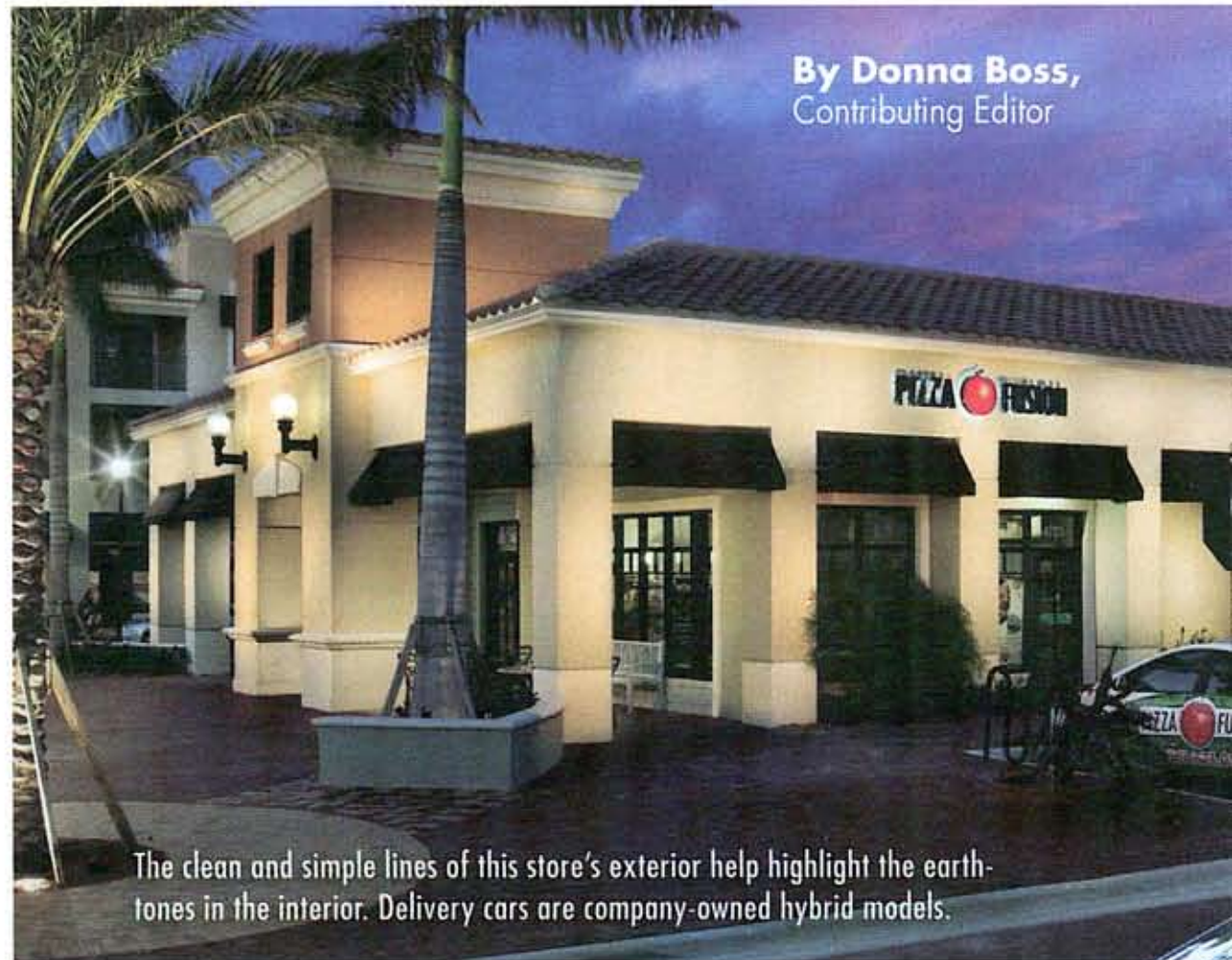


Pizza

Fusion

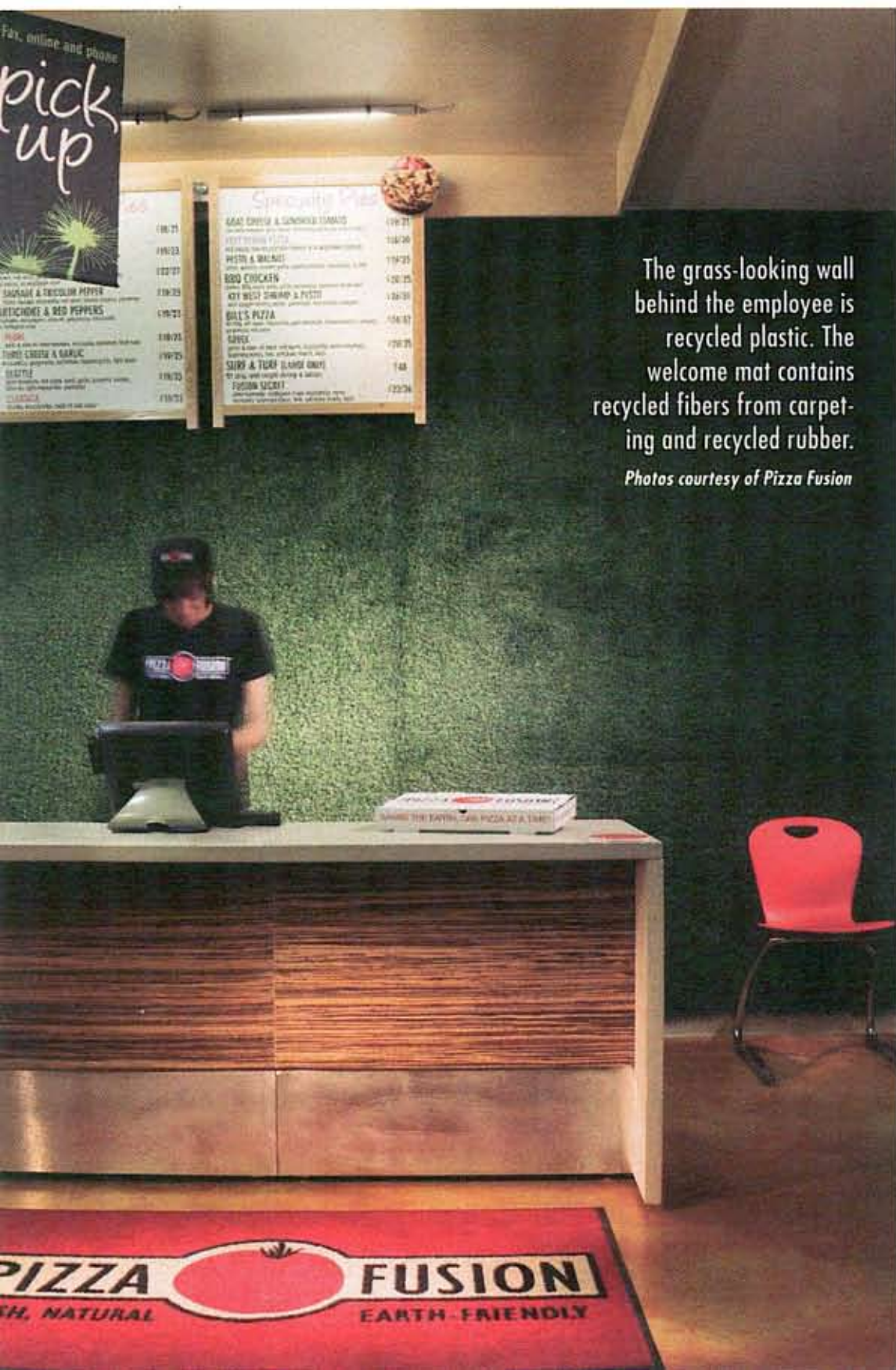
Taking an eco-friendly approach to its operations, equipment and store design, this quick-service chain charts new territory that is capturing the interest of a new generation of environmentally sensitive customers.

Last spring, eight members of the Pizza Fusion team and the founding partners ran the Rock 'n' Roll Marathon in San Diego to help raise money for a Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. "It's things like this that make your employees feel like they're part of something more than just another business," writes Pizza Fusion co-owner Vaughan Lazar in a blog post. This also explains why in Pizza Fusion's corporate culture employees are known as "family."



By Donna Boss,
Contributing Editor

The clean and simple lines of this store's exterior help highlight the earth-tones in the interior. Delivery cars are company-owned hybrid models.



The grass-looking wall behind the employee is recycled plastic. The welcome mat contains recycled fibers from carpeting and recycled rubber.

Photos courtesy of Pizza Fusion

"Make your workplace fun. Trust your employees," Lazar adds. "Don't micro-manage. Promote independent productivity. At the end of the day, you'll be happier, your employees will be happier, productivity will increase and turnover will diminish. After all, life was meant to be enjoyed and work should be part of that enjoyment."

The company's idea of enjoying a high quality of life has its origins in founders Lazar's and Michael Gordon's desire to combine pizza, eating healthy and being eco-friendly into a common-sense business model that benefits consumers and employees, and preserves and improves the environment. The corporate mission is "... to uphold the highest level of integrity in all we do, from the quality and origin of our food to our core for the health of our customers and the environment." And the motto: "Saving the Earth, One Pizza at a Time."

Pizza Fusion backs these ambitious statements by building all restaurants according to the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification standards set forth by the U.S. Green Building Council, offsetting power consumption with the purchase of Green-e certified renewable energy certificates, delivering food in company-owned hybrid vehicles and much more. (For more information, see "An Eco-Friendly Approach," page 36.) More than 75 percent of the ingredients for gourmet-style pizzas, sandwiches, wraps, salads and gluten-free brownies are organic and free of artificial additives such as sweeteners, pesticides, preservatives, growth hormones, nitrates and trans fats. The menu also features organic wine and beer.

Inside a typical store, customers enter and see a color palette reflecting an Italian pizza. The reds and oranges come forth in the logoed floor mat and chair backs. Green signs and a grass-looking wall made of recycled



chain profile

At the Palm Beach location, customers can see the beverage display unit, pizza oven, bamboo flooring and veneer, and stone slate wall when they enter.



plastic pick up the basil color. Neutral shades that reflect pizza dough, garlic and olive oil make up the color of countertops made from

100-percent recycled detergent bottles, wood studs and pre-finished maple furniture. Another feature, a stone slate wall, reinforces the environmentally friendly theme.

A refrigerated beverage display case, an organic product display, the multilevel pizza oven, pizza boxes and prep areas for sandwich, wrap and salad assembly represent the core kitchen equipment.

Pizza Fusion's target market includes neighborhoods, colleges and universities in which organic food is already in demand. At a typical Pizza Fusion store, in the back of the house, staff place food and supplies in a walk-in cooler or small freezer for primarily highly perishable seafood or on dry storage shelves.

In the cold prep area, stainless-steel prep tables with coolers underneath support assembly of salads; panini and wraps with turkey, ham, prosciutto, roast beef, New York strip and vegetables; and pizza ingredients including caramelized onions, feta cheese, portobello mushrooms, Key West Shrimp pepperoni, and pesto and sweet Italian sausage. Staff cut, wash and prep organic vegetables to control portion sizes and maintain sanitation standards. Vegetable deliveries come in up to three times a week so produce remains fresh and inventory stays low. Staff use

Facts of Note

- **Ownership:** Vaughan Lazar, Michael Gordon and Randy Romano
- **Opened:** July 2006
- **Headquarters:** Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.
- **Units:** 4 in Florida; 1 in Pennsylvania; 20 scheduled by year's end
- **Unit Size:** 2,400- - 2,600-sq.-ft.
- **Seats Per Unit:** 60
- **Average Check:** \$35; average pizza price, \$20
- **Total Annual Sales:** \$500 - \$700 per sq. ft.
- **Transactions/Daily:** 175/unit
- **Number of Franchised Restaurants:** All
- **Hours:** 11 a.m. - 11 p.m.
- **Average Patron:** Between 25 and 64, with a household income of \$50,000 or more per year
- **Service Options:** Dine-in, delivery, takeout and catering
- **Menu Specialties:** Organic selections, including pizza, panini sandwiches, wraps, breadsticks, salads, desserts, soda, teas, artisan waters, juices, wine and beer (also gluten-free beer)
- **Staff:** 8 full-time and 10 part-time/unit
- **Total Investment for Each Restaurant Design:** \$2,000
- **Equipment Investment:** \$110,000

Pizza Fusion's Players

- **Owner Partners:** Vaughan Lazar (CEO and co-founder), Michael Gordon (COO and co-founder) and Randy Romano (executive vice president and co-partner)
- **Architect:** Oliver Dannon, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.
- **Interior Designer:** Casa Conde, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.
- **Supply Development Manager:** Ashley Rathgeber
- **Vice President of Communications:** Eric Haley
- **Equipment Dealer:** Edward Don for smallwares; others not given by Pizza Fusion

chain profile

a slicer to cut prepared meats and cheese. To control portion size, staff portion cheese into cups.

Staff use can openers and piano whips to make sauces such as organic basil pesto and tomato, and olive tamenad. "We use 100-percent organic tomato puree that is packed for us in California and add a proprietary mix of spices and oils," says Ashley Rathgeber, Pizza Fusion's supply development manager.

Staff make breadsticks and pizza dough using a large floor-model mixer. "Dough is very fickle, and depends on time, temperature and humidity, so we need to keep control over it," Rathgeber says.

Dough sits in the walk-in cooler for 48 hours and is taken out and proofed until it reaches 72°F. Staff then run the dough through a sheeter, form it into a signature skateboard shape and cover it with flour, sauce and cheese. "We like to cook the sauce on the pizza, not first in another piece of equipment, so it tastes fresher," Rathgeber says.

Staff place prepared pies into a 37-square-foot, multilevel oven with rotating soapstone decks that are designed to retain heat. The oven's dual heating systems and thick insulation keep heat in and eliminate cold spots. Sliding glass doors allow customers to view the lighted interior. Expeditors remove the New York-style thin-crust pies from the oven and cut them into 16 slices for the large, 28-inch by 9-inch pies and eight slices for the 18-inch by 9-inch pies. "We can cook 30 pizzas at a time," Rathgeber says. Staff next place the pies onto bamboo peels (paddles) that are brought to guests sitting in the restaurant. Staff place takeout orders in boxes.

The store's oven also bakes brownies, cookies, proteins and breads, which are currently purchased rather than made on-site.

"A heat exchanger with copper coils that run inside is placed on top of the oven," Rathgeber says. "It collects the hot air from the oven and heats water that is running through the copper tubes and feeds it to a hot water holding tank, from which we draw hot water. This way we don't have need for a traditional hot water heater. It also heats the air in our northern stores. We worked with an engineering firm to design this."

Pizza Fusion would like eventually to pull its stores off the power grid. "We're many moons away from that," Rathgeber says. "It's difficult because of our position in strip malls and safety codes. As technol-



Another view of the entrance to Pizza Fusion shows the educational materials on display and the bamboo floors and veneers.

ogy gets better, we'll find more efficiency with solar panels, for example.

"The assembly and cooking process is as simple as possible because we want to keep the operation easy for franchisees," Rathgeber says. Franchisees train at the headquarters office, which is equipped with a full test kitchen.

An Eco-Friendly Approach

Pizza Fusion builds stores according to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification standards set forth by the United States Green Building Council. Stores offset 100 percent of their power consumption with the purchase of Green-e certified renewable energy certificates. (A Renewable Energy Certificate represents a unit of electricity generated from renewable energy with low net greenhouse gas emissions. One REC represents 1 megawatt-hour and is produced from renewable technology such as solar and wind power.)

In addition, unique characteristics of Pizza Fusion stores include:

- Company-owned hybrid vehicles to deliver food
- A menu with more than 75 percent of the items that are certified-organic
- A mandate to recycle in all stores and give customers discounts for bringing back their pizza boxes for recycling
- Exclusive use of eco-friendly cleaners to sanitize stores
- Food containers made from 100-percent cornstarch and designed to decompose in landfills in 60 days
- Spudware utensils made from 100-percent potatoes that biodegrade in 60 days
- Engineering that recycles heat from ovens to heat the water in Pizza Fusion stores
- Staff wear eco-apparel made from 100-percent organic cotton
- Use of 100-percent post-consumer toilet paper and paper towels in all bathrooms
- In-store graphics printed on banner material made from 100-percent recycled soda bottles and printed using non-VOC inks

- Energy-saving fluorescent bulbs in stores to save on energy consumption
- Bathroom sinks made entirely from bamboo
- Furniture made from reclaimed wood sources
- Reused construction elements and furniture, such as old church pews used for booth seating, furniture reclaimed from a closed bowling alley, wood flooring salvaged from an old high school gymnasium, discarded slate roof shingles reused as wall tiles, and more
- Low-flow faucet aerators on sinks in order to cut water usage by as much as 40 percent from 4 gallons per minute to 2½ gallons per minute
- Pizza peels, plateware and cutting boards made entirely from bamboo
- A cradle-to-cradle approach by reusing glass bottles from stores to manufacture countertops for future locations
- Smart lighting system in bathrooms that automatically turns off when the bathroom is vacant
- Eco-friendly paints
- Seat cushions made from naturally biodegradable latex, rather than petroleum-based foam
- Restaurant insulation made from recycled blue jeans
- Ceiling grids made from 74-percent recycled aluminum cans and 24-percent post industrial metals and baffles made from recycled composite board
- Bamboo flooring and veneer, instead of wood
- A selection policy that places units in close proximity to public transportation and maximizes the amount of natural light in stores
- Dual-flush, low-flow toilets to reduce water waste

chain profile

Each Pizza Fusion store receives certification as an organic handler and individual products receive certification in order to be labeled organic. Following procedures to maintain organic integrity is crucial to upholding the Pizza Fusion brand. For example, Rathgeber explains, in cleaning counters and hard food-contact surfaces, staff use a quaternary ammonia sanitizer that is less toxic, but leaves a small residue that they must remove with a 15-second hot water rinse. When staff bring products into the coolers, they must date and label products and also separate organic from conventional in order to avoid cross-contamination.

After preparing ingredients, staff bring them further forward in the store for assembly. Cold rails hold ingredients. Supplemental ingredients stay cold in undercounter refrigerators.

After cooks assemble items, they pass them forward to the main counters so other staff can deliver them to guests or can package for takeout.

Documentation to maintain organic certification requires extra administrative paperwork, record keeping and filing. But the extra steps are worth the effort in exchange for positive customer feedback. "The response has been terrific," Rathgeber says. "We're not only delivering a product per se, but we're educating customers about our sustainable practices." Once a month, for example, each franchisee offers a kids class in which they make pizzas and learn



Pizza assembly sits next to the pizza oven, which in some stores holds a heat exchanger above.

about Pizza Fusion's practices. The franchisees also reach out to the community through the department of commerce and local schools. In addition, the owners speak about their experiences at national conferences.

As the industry learns from Pizza Fusion, the chain will continue to learn from others' experiences in operating an eco-friendly chain. No doubt taking the initiative to help improve the quality of life for existing and future generations deserves mention.

FE&S

©2008 emuamericas



emu

emuamericas llc 800.726.0368
www.emuamericas.com

Finally, A Menu-item Programmable Timer That's Affordable & Portable

8-in-1
Programmable Digital Timer



FRIES



BREAD



TEST



FMP

Franklin Machine Products

Parts and Accessories for the Foodservice Industry
800-257-7737 • 24-Hour Fax: 800-255-9866

FMPONLINE.COM

©2008 Franklin Machine Products