

Today's Restaurant

THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY AUTHORITY

VOLUME 29

Appetizers

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The new normal for restaurants

By Paul Segreto

It's an unprecedented time for restaurants and one when failure is not an option, but change is required. Fortunately, restaurants in most cities and states are being allowed / will be allowed to offer take-out & delivery. Certainly, that's much better than just being required to close doors for the foreseeable future.

Essentially, restaurants will become ghost kitchens. Even if operators have already offered take-out & delivery, it'll be a challenge to shift entire focus on what has previously been just a small percentage of business for most restaurants. Well, take-out & delivery will be the new normal and the only chance of survival would be to view this as an opportunity, not only to survive but also to build an additional profit center for the future.

That said, a shift toward take-out & delivery must have full commitment to deliver top quality food and service. It may even require more focus on delivering a positively memorable experience than ever before. It'll be imperative to pay attention to detail, act with a sense of urgency and follow up AND follow thru.



Paul Segreto

Listed below are some suggestions & recommendations to successfully shift to this new normal:

1. Evaluate your menu for the items that travel and heat up well to look and taste as they do as if the customer is dining in your restaurant.
2. Outline reheating instructions and include with all orders.

3. Create value-added specials for families such as dinner for four – appetizer, salad, entrée & dessert.

4. Offer bottled soda as a drink offering.

5. Be prepared with proper packaging including utensils, napkins and condiments. Don't skimp on bags and boxes.

6. Create a thank you item (or items) to be included such as a low-amount gift card for a future order, a higher-amount gift card for when full dining is available, a hand-written note expressing thanks for their business, a freebie (a small order to taste another menu item)... Be creative but keep in mind, a little goes a long way!

7. Be certain to include a business card from owner or general manager with a note outlining steps should customer not be satisfied. If, and when contacted, act promptly and courteously.

8. Pay special attention to order taking AND checking of orders upon completion to ensure accuracy.

9. Ask about special food preparation requirements.

10. Add a personal touch by making sure customers know the name of

See **NEW NORMAL** page 14



Black Bear Diner plans 14 new diner openings in 2024

Redding, CA [Black Bear Diner](#), one of the fastest-growing restaurant franchises in the country, famous for its abundant portions of home-style comfort food, unique cabin-themed dining experience and exceptional guest service, recently announced its plans for growth in 2024 with 14 planned new diner openings. The company will open its doors to at least nine new franchise-owned diners and five new corporate-owned diners.

In addition to growth plans

with current franchise-partners for openings in California, Texas and Arizona, Black Bear Diner has also welcomed two new franchise-partners to its system – LVP Foodservice – with plans for four 2024 openings in Kansas, Arizona, Nevada, and Colorado; and Gursavri Group, with plans for an Arizona diner. The new diners will be a combination of conversions and ground up new builds and will incorporate recent design enhancements to better accommodate off-premise dining.

“The confidence in our brand is strong,” said Anita Adams, Chief Executive Officer of Black Bear Diner. “Based on strong bottom-line performance, existing franchisees are investing in new diner locations, while new franchise-partners have come aboard as Black Bear Diner complements their portfolio with our unique full-service brand.”

Continuing their strategy of developing the strong Texas market, the

See **BLACK BEAR** page 4

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Appell Pie Trends

Howard Appell ♦ Today's Restaurant Publisher

This column was written in May of 2010 and it sounds like it was written today, except for the prices mentioned.

Over the past few months we have witnessed a change in the way business and personal spending is being approached. Our whole society is sliding back to the economic principals of the nineteen fifties which featured cautious spending of what was earned and not relying on credit cards.


Businesses are looking for ways to maximize their profits with as little expense as possible. Labor costs are being cut and those that still have a job are being asked to do more than before to keep it. Those who have lost their job have had to look for new opportunities or start their own businesses.

Trends are emerging in the restaurant industry towards more comfort foods like cupcakes, breakfast specialty foods, yogurt and ice cream stores. Two restaurant/dessert companies I think are worthy of mention are Flapjacks Pancake Cabin and Orange Leaf.

is simple, assorted flavored pancakes, eggs and sides along with Skillet. They are open from 7AM - 12 Noon and their profit margin must be sky high. Coffee, tea, milk and juice at \$2.00 plus make up the balance of the menu. The menu is repetitive and easy to produce and students or local residents supply the labor. This type of restaurant will only work in a high traffic tourist area and will not please everyone but the huge profit make up for an occasional bad review caused by expectations from a customer base made up of people from all over the world.

The next concept is not new to me as I supplied the furniture to a store about twenty years ago in Ft. Lauderdale with the same method of operation. As I always say "Timing is everything" and their idea was way ahead of its time. Orange Leaf has come along at the right time and is supplying the right product to fill the comfort food niche and making a profit too.

As you enter the store you are directed to a station to pick up a sixteen ounce Styrofoam cup and follow the line to a series of six - eight soft serve machines that are available with numerous flavors. You select the flavors and the amount you want and continue down the line to the Topping Bar which has all of the customary toppings and then some. The final stop is to the scale where the price is calculated on a per ounce basis. Low labor costs, low product cost and high profit margin make this a business for our economic times.

The old adage that Necessity is the mother of invention was never truer than today. With people looking for work and considering new ventures the conditions which we have to operate in must be taken into account. Remember the timing has to be right for any new idea to work regardless of how good it is. 

*As I always say
"Timing is everything"
and their idea was way
ahead of its time.*

On a recent trip to Gatlinburg Tennessee, we came upon a beautiful ski chalet style building with natural wood logs and warm inviting colors inside. I remarked that the building must have cost a million dollars to build and equip. Flapjack's Pancake Cabin

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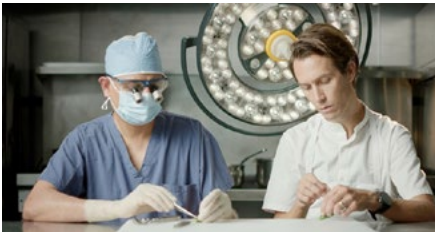
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What's Going On

Important new products, corporate news and industry events



The Heart Surgeon's Cookbook is the brainchild of New York-based Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgeon Dr. Nirav Patel and Fredrik Berselius, holder of two Michelin stars and Founder & Owner of Aska restaurant in New York. They have collaborated with global MedTech provider Getinge to create a cookbook that not only celebrates the physical and mental dexterity of both doctor and chef, but also shares their experiences in precision and mastery of tools. All nine recipes, conceived and developed by Fredrik and Dr. Patel include at least one surgical technique familiar to surgeons that puts dexterity to the test: including precise cutting, injecting in a small, confined area, surgical stitching, anatomic dissecting and repetition, plus gentle handling and concentration skills. Dr. Patel, who performs approximately 350 surgical procedures per year, and enjoys cooking as a hobby, says this was the first time he'd applied his surgical skills in the kitchen: "A special cookbook for heart surgeons,

Fluffy Fluffy, a dessert café renowned for its award-winning souffle pancakes, is adding to its footprint in the Southern part of the United States through its industry-leading franchise opportunity. The brand is eagerly anticipating the opening of new locations in the South. Their Frisco, TX location opened on December 16th, and Dallas, TX is set to debut in March 2024. Fluffy Fluffy also has ambitious plans for additional franchised locations, including multi-unit deals in key southern cities including **Atlanta, Miami, and Orlando**. "We are thrilled to extend our reach into the South," expressed Benson Lau, Director of Business Development at Fluffy Fluffy. "The South is a rich tapestry of culture, and we are genuinely excited to immerse ourselves as part of it. We believe our unique experience and diverse flavors have the power to bring communities together, and we can't wait to continue our growth in Texas, Georgia, Florida and beyond."



using my skills from the operating room? I just couldn't say no. Dexterity leads to precision. Without precision, surgery is not effective. You must understand the importance of being effortlessly nimble and precise. It's not that hard to see the parallels with high-end cooking." Visit Getinge.com to learn more.

Small businesses are the backbone of the U.S. economy, generating 44% of gross domestic product and nearly half of overall employment. As a vital growth engine, the market has a need for accurate and timely insight into small business sales activity. Fiserv, a leading global provider of payments and financial services technology solutions, has recently launched the **Fiserv Small Business Index**, a first-of-its-kind measurement tool for



assessing the health of small businesses at the national, regional, and industry levels. The FSBI will be published at the beginning of every month and it will provide near real-time indexes of consumer spending from the prior month. The index relies on data from approximately two million small businesses and is differentiated by its direct aggregation of consumer spending activity based on actual point-of-sale transactions, including card, cash, and check transactions, rather than survey data.



The opening of Damsel, Atlanta's first Supper Club and Cabaret is opening soon. Damsel will be a must-see destination that transcends age, culture and gender. Housed in a spectacular 10,000-square-foot showplace, Damsel will be the jewel in the crown of The Works on Atlanta's Upper Westside. Dave Green, Owner of Damsel, and

See **WHAT'S GOING ON** page 8

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Are your people an asset or liability?

By Monte Silva

Do you think of your people as a means to an end? I used to. Early in my career I ran through people because completing the task was more important than leading and developing my people. Fortunately, I also figured it was easier to do it then teach it. I learned from my dumb mistakes pretty quickly and then really shifted my perspective.

Today, I work with restaurant owners to help them run and scale successful restaurants. One of the things I share with them is they can't do it without their people. In this article I want to share a very important thing I learned. This shift changed the way I led people and managed restaurants and I owe ALL of my success to rethinking this concept.

Your people are humans with emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and personalities. They are not just a number or a cog on a wheel. They are the essence of our business. But we often think of them as a number. We think of them as labor (a negative liability on our P&L). I used to do that.

When I thought of them as a liability, I paid them as little as possible to save money because controlling profit was more important than building teams. This showed my people that I didn't value them. Everyone wants to feel valued and validated. I had to learn this and then rid myself of the false belief that restaurateurs clung to for 50 years ...

False Belief: Underpaying your people equals profits

But when I looked at my people as an investment rather than a liability? I looked at them as an asset on a balance sheet instead of a liability on the P&L.

New Belief: Your people are an asset

Let me illustrate this point. What if you hired a general manager at \$100,000 a year and that GM shows you five things you can do to save \$150,000 a year? Instead of looking at the \$100,000 salary as a liability on a P&L, what if you thought of the GM as an asset that gave you a 50 percent return on your investment? You would probably pop the champagne or pour some Pappy 23 year if any other paper investment paid you a 50 percent return.

Because of this false belief, most restaurant managers and owners not



Monte Silva

only don't pay their people a fair wage, but they also don't properly train their people. If restaurateurs thought of their employees as an asset, they would look at training as an investment in the growth of their asset as well as the growth of the restaurant.

Instead, they try to spend as little as possible training them. Then, they wonder why that employee doesn't know the menu, doesn't follow steps of service, etc. And worse yet, they don't

stick around because they weren't set up for success. We don't invest because in the back of our minds, we think they are going to leave us anyway. They will leave you if this is your mindset.

Don't under pay your people to lower the liability. Think of them as the asset they are. Invest in them. Develop them. Appreciate them. Chances are, when you pay and treat them that way, they will continue to out-perform and surprise you with amazing returns and you will begin to build a bigger pie.

It's important to focus on the relationship. This helps you think of them as a human and not just a number. As I wrote earlier, people have emotions, strengths, and weaknesses. We sometimes don't know what is going on with them outside the restaurant. There might be something that might be affecting their time in the restaurant.

Once, I had a server assistant working with me. He was fantastic. He had a great attitude. He did a fantastic job. Everyone loved him. Then, all of a sudden, things were different. He was sluggish. He lashed out at the servers and other staff. He was negative.

I sat him down and asked him what was going on in his life. He broke down and told me that he was a senior in high school, and he was flunking math. He went on to tell me that if he didn't pass math he was going to have to repeat the 12th grade.


I told him to bring his books in every Tuesday night and that I would tutor him after work on Tuesdays. He

went on to being a great server assistant again. But, more importantly, he finished high school on time.

Be kind to your people. Show them empathy when they need it. Develop a relationship with your people and they will be hard working, loyal, and trustworthy. Pay them well. Invest in their training. If you do these things, you will see amazing results.

Recap:

Here is a quick recap of five things you can do to prioritize your people.

1. People are your best asset:
Don't treat them like a liability
2. Pay your people
3. Spend the money and energy to create a great culture
4. Invest in the development of your people
5. Focus on relationships 

About the Author: My restaurants were consistently named in best of categories of several Nashville magazines in reader and writer polls. My successful stewardship of these restaurants got me featured in Nashville Wine Press, The Tasting Panel, Restaurant Business Magazine, Nashville Scene, and many other publications. One of those restaurants was Acme Feed & Seed (the 31st highest grossing restaurant in the country at \$18,500,000.) I later became Director of Operations overseeing four restaurants including Acme. And I did it while maintaining work/life balance. Today, I am an expert restaurateur, restaurant coach, thought leader, author, and speaker. I work with restaurant owners, executives and their teams all over the country to maximize the success of their restaurant empire while still maintaining work/life balance. Monte Silva is a Restaurant Executive Coach. For more information visit www.montesilvacoaching.com


Black Bear from page 1

company also plans to open five new company owned diners throughout the state in 2024. Locations include a third San Antonio diner, as well as additional diners in Dallas, Houston and Rio Grande Valley. Early 2025 will see an additional five diners open as well.

Black Bear Diner ended the year with the opening of its newest diner located at 12613 South Freeway in Burleson, Texas on December 13. The opening marks the brand's third diner in the Dallas Fort Worth area,

joining existing locations in Alliance and Mesquite. The newest diner boasts 5,000 square feet and features Black Bear Diner's updated design enhancements, including its exterior delivery and pickup window that expedites off-premise business. The opening signals the end of another strong year for the company, which opened new diners in Texas, California, Utah and Arizona.

For more details on Black Bear Diner's franchise opportunities please visit BlackBearDinerFranchise.com and

for more information on Black Bear Diner and its menu offerings visit BlackBearDiner.com. 

About Black Bear Diner: Black Bear Diner is one of the fastest-growing franchises in the country. Founded in 1995 by Bruce Dean and Bob Manley in Mt. Shasta, California, Black Bear Diner brings home-style comfort food classics, exceptional guest service, and a unique cabin-theme to the dining experience. The quickly growing full-service concept, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, offers a vast, enticing menu anchored in hearty portions and excellent value, with service rooted in genuine hospitality. The franchise now operates 156 diners in 13 states.



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Sunshine Provisions welcomes the New Year with growth

South Florida's premiere homegrown purveyor of premium meats & gourmet goods expanding in 2024

When entrepreneurs and business partners Michael Saperstein and Evan David first opened [Sunshine Provisions](#) in late 2015, the duo's mission was to procure high-end meats, seafood, and other goods for the area's top chef-driven restaurants. After all, they were seasoned veterans in the restaurant industry and Saperstein was a highly-regarded chef in his own right, primarily at the beloved Rebel House restaurant and bar in Boca Raton. "Mike and I saw an opportunity for a meat and gourmet food purveyor that was built around the customer and their needs, regardless of whether that was a restaurant or a home chef looking for the best product they could get their hands on," says David of those early days."

On average, the Sunshine Provisions headquarters houses over \$1M in high-end inventory at any given time...

Fast forward eight years and Sunshine Provisions has become one of the most trusted suppliers for South Florida's award-winning restaurants and diehard foodies alike, so much so that it has solidified its position as a premium goods delivery service direct to consumers. In 2024, the Deerfield Beach based company will expand its service area to other regions of Florida, as well as begin providing express delivery to homes across the United States.

With a prestigious designation as a certified USDA purveyor, a 15,000 sq-ft state-of-the-art facility, burger and sausage lab, dry-age room, and a team of former chefs and butchers managing day-to-day operations, Sunshine Provisions has become an industry leader. According to Saperstein, "The standards we adhere to ensure we are meticulous in maintaining the highest levels of safety, integrity, and quality." In fact, the company has a dedicated quality control staff member who systematically checks various stages of production - from sourcing to packaging - to guarantee all products meet the company's highest criteria. Between that and their proprietary internal protocols to make certain that only the freshest product makes it to their



short rib bones don't deliver the way you want them to and guide them to order marrow bones instead. It's more economical and the product is better for that particular use," he explains. It is this individualized customer experience that keeps chefs and restaurants coming back.

On average, the Sunshine Provisions headquarters, which operates round the clock, houses over \$1M in high-end inventory at any given time with a team of 40 working diligently to create, cut, package, and distribute. From custom cut steaks and chops for One Hotel and award-winning Chef Brad Kilgore at the Arlo to specialty burgers for Ted's and Blue Collar, to Australian and Domestic Wagyu for chefs of note such as Jeremy Ford and Michael Pirolo, and custom-made sausages and proprietary spice blends for OSSO; Sunshine Provisions caters to the needs of some of the most acclaimed chefs and restaurants in the region. The company offers an extensive selection of top tier cheeses, salumi, and specialty Asian and Mediterranean dry goods. Also available are high-end stocked products like Umami White Dry Aged Beef, 15+ different types of burger blends, and an array of premium house made

clients, Sunshine Provisions has raised the bar in their field.

A James Beard Award "Rising Chef" nominee, Saperstein employs his culinary prowess at Sunshine to work closely with chefs and restaurateurs in customizing cuts, flavor blends (i.e. customized sausage and burger blends) and more to give each restaurant unique one-of-a-kind products. He is often tapped by clients to advise on what to order based on intended use. "I'll have a Chef who wants a short rib to make a dish and perhaps, use the bones for another dish, but I'll explain that

See **SUNSHINE** page 11

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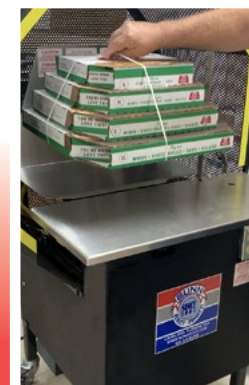
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Scooters Coffee perking up in Texas and Louisiana

Omaha, NE - [Scooter's Coffee, LLC](#), the Midwest-based drive-thru coffee franchise experiencing record-breaking growth, continues its expansion throughout the U.S. by bringing its world-class coffee kiosks to Louisiana. Some locations include: Ruston, Minden, Blanchard also coming to Benton, Louisiana and Marshall Texas.

The expansion into the Shreveport, Louisiana area, as well as the nearby Texas town of Marshall, is the result of agreements signed by longtime friends and real estate developers John Rennie and Brad Barre. The men had been talking about opening a franchise together for over a year. "Last summer, a friend of mine posted a picture of coffee and a cinnamon roll on social media with the comment 'I wish we had Scooter's in Shreveport,'" said John.

"We fell in love with the concept from the get-go," said Brad. The two men had never tried Scooter's Coffee,



drive-thru-only kiosk model, combined with their fast, friendly service, allows customers to "scoot in" on their way to work or school to buy their favorite beverage and get their day off to a great start.

"Our goal is to move pretty quickly. We would love to have all five of our stores open in 2024," said John.

"As real estate developers, we are very familiar with finding lots, dealing with permitting, and the other aspects that can often bog down the construction process. We feel this advantage can help us accelerate the opening of our stores" said Brad.

"We're thrilled to welcome John Rennie and Brad Barre as franchisees to the Scooter's Coffee family," says Matt Sawicki, Senior Director of Franchise Development. "Their enthusiasm and experience as real estate developers give them a unique advantage in accelerating our growth in the Shreveport and Marshall areas." 

Scooter's Coffee, based in Omaha, Nebraska, specializes in espresso drinks, fruit smoothies, and baked from scratch pastries...

but Brad's brother was a regular customer. "I called my brother and told him to go to the one near him, order everything on the menu, and tell me what he thought," said Brad.

Scooter's Coffee, based in Omaha, Nebraska, specializes in espresso drinks, fruit smoothies, and baked-from-scratch pastries and features its signature beverage, the Caramelicious®. The company also offers a wide selection for all taste profiles with its organic hot and iced teas, premium-grade

brewed coffee, cold brew, breakfast items, and a kids' menu.

According to the latest market trends compiled by the National Coffee Association, 63% of Americans drank coffee in the past day — more than any other beverage, including water. Those coffee drinkers each consume an average of 2.8 cups every day. Zippia Research reports that 60% of American coffee drinkers visit a coffee shop at least once a month.

Scooter's Coffee's proven 664 sq. ft.

About Scooter's Coffee: Founded in 1998 by Don and Linda Eckles in Bellevue, Nebraska, Scooter's Coffee uses only the finest coffee beans in the world, which are roasted by its affiliated company, Harvest Roasting, in Omaha, Nebraska. In over 25 years of business, the key to Scooter's Coffee's success is simple: Stay committed to the original business principles and the company's four core values, which are Integrity, Love, Humility, and Courage. The Scooter's Coffee Brand Promise, often recited to franchisees, customers, and employees, is: "Amazing People, Amazing Drinks... Amazingly Fast!®" It represents the company's business origins and reflects a steady commitment to providing an unforgettable experience to loyal and new customers.

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What's Going On from page 3

known for favorite local restaurant, The Select, has curated a team of leaders in both the entertainment and culinary worlds, to spearhead the creation of Damsel. Internationally acclaimed Director and Choreographer Otis Sallid has been tapped as Damsel's Creative Director and is creating a reimagined, immersive Cabaret show. Sallid is known for his hit Broadway Show "Smokey Joe's Café," as well as choreographing the hit television show "Fame," the 69th Academy Awards, the Grammy's and the live segment event in Superbowl XL, featuring Stevie Wonder, John Legend, India Arie and Joss Stone. These and dozens of other equally impressive credits make Sallid the perfect creative force to produce a world-class, dazzling show that will be the highlight of the Damsel experience. Damsel, which is slated to open at The Works in the next couple of months, joins over 40 tenants within the first phase of The Works.

start of six new locations being built in Alabama. Construction on the 1st will start this Spring to Summer and open sometime in 2025. They will be built in phases. FoodCity.com. Food City is a supermarket chain with stores located in Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia.



◆◆◆◆◆ **Global hospitality and entertainment company Delaware North has announced the appointment of John Kolaski as president of Patina Restaurant Group.** He is a veteran hospitality leader with more than 30 years of experience building culinary brands and leading restaurant operations. As president of Patina Restaurant Group, Kolaski will be based at Delaware North's headquarters in Buffalo – with oversight of the company's portfolio of streetside restaurants and catering operations in high-profile locations such as Downtown Disney, Disney Springs, Walt Disney World, New York City, Los Angeles and Boston. Kolaski will report to Jamie Oblatz, who was also recently elevated to the role of group president with responsibility for Patina Restaurant Group.



John Kolaski

◆◆◆◆◆ **Food City's parent company, KVAT Food Stores Inc., headquartered in Abingdon, Virginia, has released that they have purchased about 2 acres of land for a new location off of Governor's Drive in Huntsville, Alabama.** This is the

Oblatz, who has been a Delaware North operating company president since 2020, currently serves as group president of Sportservice, Patina Restaurant Group and Delaware North U.K. In addition to Patina Restaurant Group, he is responsible for providing oversight and strategic direction for the company's sports portfolio which provides concessions, premium dining, catering and retail services to more than 50 sports and entertainment venues in the United States. He also oversees the company's hospitality operations in the United Kingdom at locations such as Wembley Stadium, London Stadium and Emirates Stadium.

◆◆◆◆◆ **Pizza Twist** is coming to Florida, according to an announcement made by the company recently. The international pizza chain favored by fans for its global-inspired pizza combinations, non-GMO meats, and gluten-free, halal, vegan, and vegetarian menu options will soon open in the Sanford and Lake Mary areas of Florida. The newest unit was purchased by franchisees Santoshi Muppala, Rajasree Suraparaju, and Nikitha Koneti. This will be the very first location to land in Florida for Pizza Twist. The unique Indian-fusion pizza concept can also be found in communities across the United States, Indonesia, and Canada. The company currently has nearly 120 locations in various

stages of development or in operation. "Our team is honored to be working with our newest group of franchise partners and are very excited to set foot in Florida for the very first time," stated Harpreet Dahyia, founder and owner of Pizza Twist. "This is an incredible milestone to kick off the new year with. Our team looks forward to more exciting developments throughout 2024."



◆◆◆◆◆ **Coming in 2025 is Nora to West Palm Beach.** NDT Development, Place Projects, and Wheelock Street Capital came together to design the blueprint for a complete, new district in Downtown West Palm. NDT Co-founder Ned Grace, has developed across property types including hospitality, residential, office, and mixed-use. Nora's Phase I includes 150,000 square feet of adaptive reuse and new development and will be home to best-in-class hospitality, retail, and more. Phase II is actively being planned and will feature significant hotel, office, and residential development. The Nora District is bordered by Palm Beach Lakes Boulevard to the north, Quadrille Boulevard to the south, North Dixie Highway to the east, and the Florida East Coast (F.E.C.) Railway to the west. For all

See **WHAT'S GOING ON** page 14



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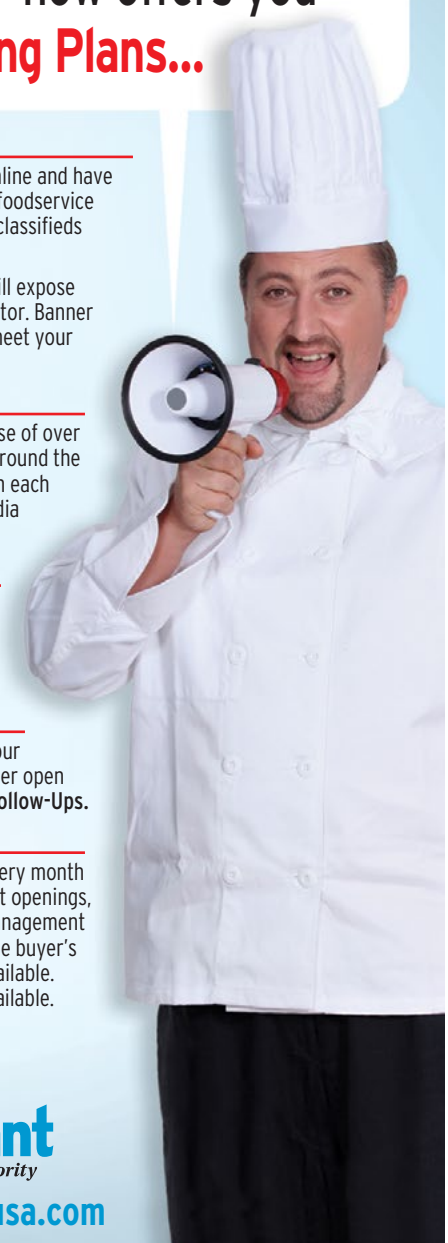
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Stephanie Fischer takes the lead at Georgia Restaurant Association

New President/CEO shares vision for the organization, plans to nurture relationships with restaurants statewide

Atlanta, GA - The Georgia Restaurant Association (GRA) celebrates a new chapter as Stephanie Fischer brings new leadership, a new culture of collaboration and a strategic plan for growth. As president and CEO, her immediate focus is on building relationships within the restaurant industry by traveling the state to meet and connect with stakeholders outside the major cities.

"The best way to get to know the Georgia restaurant industry is to get out and dine with them," says Fischer. "Every community has its own local flavors and faces its own challenges. It's so important to understand what is happening throughout the state and not just here in Atlanta."

During her statewide travels, Fischer will meet with restaurant operators, local officials and industry leaders to learn about their businesses firsthand and discover the barriers that are impacting their operations. "Many of our members are not part of large restaurant groups, rather they are independent restaurateurs. It's my goal to make sure that all our members feel supported," says Fischer.

In her first days as president and CEO, Fischer will connect with state

lawmakers to advocate for the needs of the restaurant industry. At the same time, she is connecting with the GRA team and meeting with each board member to understand their roles and expectations.

"I look forward to continuing the great work of the GRA Advocacy Team," says Fischer. "During the legislative session and year-round, we will promote policies at both the state and local levels that ensure our members have a healthy business environment. We are excited to advocate in support of the state's second-largest employer and promote all the things Georgia restaurateurs do to give back to their communities."

The GRA will continue to engage with its members through educational offerings, networking opportunities and signature events like the Taste of Georgia legislative reception, Kitchen Cabinet roundtable discussions throughout the state, Wine Down by the River/PAC Fundraiser, the annual GRA Golf Tournament and the Georgia Restaurant Association Crystal of Excellence (GRACE) Awards.

"Our industry has faced some challenging times over the past four years, especially around staffing and rising



Stephanie Fischer

Fischer is no stranger to the GRA or the restaurant business. She has spent her entire career in hospitality...

food costs. Through it all, the industry has been incredibly resilient," says Fischer. "As we grow our membership, we will develop new and innovative ways to support our members and make their jobs easier. Enhancing the value of GRA membership remains a top priority."

Fischer is no stranger to the GRA or the restaurant business. She has spent her entire career in hospitality, from her first job at KFC to her previous role as vice president of corporate operations of Paradies Lagardère Travel Retail Dining Division. In 2017, she joined the GRA board of directors and served as chairman in 2022, representing the industry on the national level to advocate for important issues like the Credit Card Competition Act and preserving the tip credit. With decades of leadership and advocacy experience under her belt, Fischer is ready to lead the GRA into this next chapter. 

About the Georgia Restaurant Association: The Georgia Restaurant Association's (GRA) mission is to serve as the voice for Georgia's restaurants in advocacy, education, and awareness. From large chains to start-ups, the GRA helps make Georgia a better place for restaurants to do business and helps make restaurants better for Georgia. For more information, visit garestaurants.org.



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Love's Travel Stops receives USDA grant to help increase access to affordable biofuels in Florida

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Florida State Director Lakeisha Hood Mose announced that USDA is awarding \$4,943,820 to Love's Travel Stops & Country Stores to increase the availability of domestic biofuels in Florida and give Americans cleaner, more affordable fuel options at gas station pumps.

"Rural America is the backbone of our economy and key to enabling our energy independence and reducing our reliance on fossil fuels," Hood Mose said.

Love's Travel Stops & Country Stores will use the award to install E15 fuel dispensers—which contain a gasoline-ethanol blend—at fueling stations in Ocala, Lee, and Ormond Beach. Blending ethanol into gasoline has helped reduce fuel costs by [approximately 25 percent](#), contributing



to falling gas prices across the country.

The Department is making the award through the [Higher Blends Infrastructure Incentive Program](#) (HBIIP), made possible with funding from the [Inflation Reduction Act](#). HBIIP increases the number of Americans that benefit from falling prices by expanding the use of ethanol-based fuels at gas stations around the nation. USDA has invested more than \$96 million nationwide to

increase access to biofuels at fueling stations.

Background: Higher Blends Infrastructure Incentive Program

The [Higher Blends Infrastructure Incentive Program](#) (HBIIP) provides grants to fueling station and distribution facility owners, including marine, rail, and home heating oil facilities, to help expand access to domestic biofuels, a clean and affordable source of energy. These investments help business owners install and upgrade infrastructure such as fuel pumps, dispensers and storage tanks. Expanding the availability of homegrown biofuels strengthens energy independence, creates new revenue for American businesses and brings good-paying jobs to rural communities.

In June 2023, USDA made \$450 million available in Inflation Reduction Act funding through the HBIIP to expand the use and availability of higher-blend biofuels. That same month, USDA also announced the first round of Inflation Reduction Act-funded HBIIP awardees.

USDA continues to accept applications for funding to expand access to domestic biofuels. These grants will support the infrastructure needed to reduce out-of-pocket costs for transportation fueling and distribution facilities to install and upgrade biofuel-related infrastructure such as pumps, dispensers and storage tanks. There are three quarterly application windows left, and the program ends Sept. 30, 2024. The next application deadline is March 31, 2024.

For more information, go to the [HBIIP webpage](#). 

NAKS acquires Stainless Specialties, Inc.

Elyria, Ohio - North American Kitchen Solutions, Inc. ("NAKS") a leading foodservice equipment manufacturer headquartered in Elyria, OH, has announced the acquisition of Stainless Specialties, Inc. ("SSI"), an Eastlake, OH (Cleveland) based custom fabricator of high-quality stainless-steel equipment used in restaurants and other commercial environments.

Founded in 1993, SSI is an industry leader in the production of NSF-listed stainless-steel countertops, tabletops, worktables, sinks, and other work surfaces essential to the efficient operation of restaurants and other food service facilities. Through thoughtful design, engineering, and state-of-the-art equipment, SSI delivers custom-fabricated solutions that meet the highest quality standards for safety and aesthetics.

SSI is the latest entity to join the NAKS organization. The company acquired Lane Mechanical Inc. in 2021, a stainless-steel custom fabrication

company based in Georgia (Atlanta). SSI is NAKS' 3rd production facility, rapidly expanding the company's operating footprint.

"We're thrilled to welcome SSI to our organization. SSI's production facility in Eastlake, OH, will increase our custom fabrication capacity and create a best-in-class 'purpose-built' manufacturing organization of stainless-steel commercial restaurant equipment," said Sacha Polakoff, NAKS President & CEO. "We're just as excited to welcome the team from SSI into the NAKS family," added Polakoff. "SSI's team, along with the team from our 2021 acquisition of Lane Mechanical, brings together the best talent in the custom fabrication segment and furthers the goal of bringing the entirety of our product offering closer to our valued customers." 

About North American Kitchen Solutions (NAKS): Established in 1987, NAKS and its subsidiary HoodMart specialize in designing and manufacturing ventilation systems and custom-fab-

ricated workspaces for the large and growing commercial cooking industry. NAKS manufactures a wide variety of proprietary leading-edge ventilation systems that can be purchased separately or as part of complete ventilation systems, including exhaust fans, supply fans, fire suppression systems, ductwork, and accessories.

About Valesco Industries: Valesco is a Dallas, Texas-based private equity firm that focuses on making control and non-control

investments in select growth-oriented small- and lower-middle-market businesses engaged in manufacturing, distribution, and business-to-business services. Valesco specializes in partnering with a company's management team to support its growth objectives. As long-term industry veterans, the principals have capitalized and built numerous successful businesses, serving those companies in varying roles as investors, managers, advisors, and directors.

Sunshine from page 6

sausages including duck, foie gras, and truffle and date sausage, as well as a Wagyu cheeseburger sausage.

In early 2024, Sunshine Provisions will introduce its White Gold Label line featuring domestic Black Angus upper Choice and Prime beef, as well as premium heritage all-natural Duroc pork raised according to Heluka™ guidelines, ensuring maximum quality and purity. The new year also promises growth for the company with expanded service west to Naples and south into the Florida Keys. Says David, "We are constantly receiving inquiries from restaurants throughout the state, yet we believe that by expanding slowly and organically we can continue to deliver the highest quality product and exceptional service."

Foodies will also rejoice with Sunshine Provisions' new country-wide consumer service, offering

express delivery to 50 states across the continental U.S. With the same products available to top-tier restaurants, as well as bundled packages and subscriptions, home chefs can up their culinary game with a selection of the finest meats, seafood, and premium goods. Packages will include All Grass All The Time – an assortment of premium grass fed offerings; Surf & Turf – the freshest selections from land and sea; and It's Burger Time – award-winning burger patties; and more.

As Sunshine Provisions – sunshineprovisions.com - looks ahead to an exciting year of growth, innovation and continued commitment to culinary excellence, the company remains steadfast in its mission to provide top-tier meats and gourmet goods to acclaimed restaurants and passionate home chefs. 

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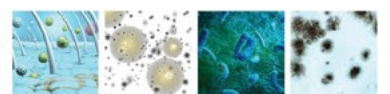
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Be relentless

It's a race with no finish line — but with great rewards

John Tschohl ♦ Today's Restaurant Contributor

No matter what you are pursuing in life, it's critical that you commit to being relentless in your efforts to achieve your goal. If you're an athlete, that means training until you're exhausted. If you're a performer, it means practicing endlessly. If you own or head a business, it means doing everything you possibly can to provide exceptional customer service.

Most companies, however, don't commit to providing service that is so awesome that it keeps their current customers coming back to them—and that attracts new customers who will help to drive their profits. They aren't relentless in their pursuit of driving their business to greater heights by focusing on customer service.

What does it mean to be relentless? It's an obsession with providing exceptional service to your customers. It's a propulsive, self-directed passion to continue to learn, improve, and exceed expectations in everything you do. Much like breathing, it's essential to your being, and it never stops. It's a race without a finish line. It's a reflection of the core principles, beliefs, and attitudes of people within healthy and hugely successful businesses.

Being relentless requires that you follow two rules. The first is: Serve the customer. The second is: When you are in doubt, see rule number one.

When you are relentless, you weave customer service into the fabric of your company; you make it part of your culture. It can't be a flavor of the week. It requires a constant and continuous dedication to providing customers with such extraordinary service that they continue to return for years to do business with you.

The commitment to being relentless must start of the top of your organization and be woven into every employee at every level.

Executives of publicly held companies might respond to what I've written here by saying, "Shareholder value should always come first." Shareholder value means providing a good return

on investment—but those returns don't exist without people who buy your products or services. When you provide awesome customer service, you will drive your business to great heights; it's a win for you and for your investors.

The commitment to being relentless must start of the top of your organization and be woven into every employee at every level. It must be a belief that is shared by everyone. You must recognize that serving your customers is your most important task and then reflect that realization with every decision you make and every action you take. Every employee must be trained in relentlessly providing exceptional customer service, and that training must be provided on a regular basis. Let them know what you expect of them, and set a good example with your own actions.

You'll never get into the Super Bowl of business unless you've got a great team; a good team will be left behind. Just as young athletes look to professionals as their heroes and role models, look for business role models that are wildly successful and profitable because of the customer service they provide. Here are a few of them I recommend you check out: Mayo Clinic, Amazon, Wilderness

Safaris, Chewy.com, K-VA-T & Food City, and Northeast Delta Dental. What are they doing that you can incorporate into your organization?

In every organization—and at every level and in every job—at the end of the day ask yourself, "How did my work today help, support, and serve the customer?" Being relentless in serving your customers builds the bottom line and long-term growth prospects for an organization. No matter what your business is, you must recognize that customers provide your income stream. To keep that stream flowing, keep your customers happy. Put their needs at the forefront of everything you do.

About the Author: John Tschohl is the founder and president of the Service Quality Institute—the global leader in customer service—with operations in more than 40 countries. He is considered one of the world's foremost authorities on all aspects of customer service and has developed 20 customer service training programs, including *Relentless Making Customer Service Your Core Principle*, that are used by companies throughout the world. His monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge at www.customer-service.com. He can also be reached on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

John Tschohl, President of Service Quality Institute can be reached at 1-612-382-5636. Visit him online at www.Customer-Service.com and www.JohnTschohl.com as well as his website www.MyPersonalSuccess.com.

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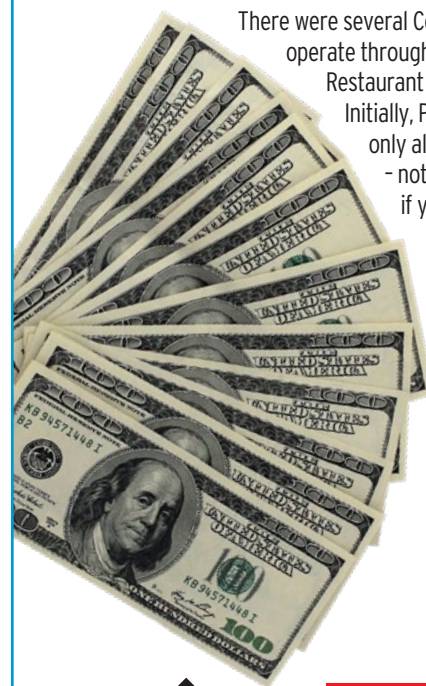


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What you can expect in 2024

By Aaron Allen

Does it feel quiet out there to you these days? Like the other shoe is about to drop?

Yep, many are bracing for a global recession and a whole lot of other industry implications of rapidly evolving business dynamics. The Rolling Recession Our view is that there will be a “rolling recession” in 2024 that will be felt in specific pockets at different times giving a seemingly mild sense of impact overall but putting acute pressure on others as they get pinched.

Credit and Debt Collapse?

There will be fallout from the corporate credit crisis — which is contributing to debt covenants getting tripped, a sharp uptick in business failures in the last two quarters of 2023, business valuations taking a hit, and making it harder for small businesses and early-stage foodservice technology companies to raise capital. Big corporates (as well as specialized funds with dry powder for buying debt on the secondaries markets — trillions of dollars in debt has to be repapered in the coming couple years) will leverage their wherewithal for more growth, expansion, and capitalized investments for performance optimization, leading to further industry consolidation. We also see some exciting opportunities for operators and investors as commercial real estate



Aaron Allen

experiences its fast approaching period of transformation.

The Rapidly Evolving Consumer and Competitive Environment

Consumer dining behavior evolved more in the last few years than the past few decades. The industry has responded with new formats, creative channel development, and beefing up their

tech stack. There has been tremendous population migration (putting new emphasis on the importance of geospatial analysis and further impact analysis for chains contemplating changes in the composition of their portfolio).

Too much happening here to cover in a single sitting, but expect a lot more ‘modernization’ and ‘transformation’ initiatives (hint: a few of many green shoots we’re watching include the return of the big box concepts, retooled commercial real estate, and Home Meal Replacement 2.0).

The Heart of Hospitality

Expect to see some retraining investments being made by responsible leaders in the industry. The labor woes of the last few years has compounded already difficult circumstances. Service has suffered while margins have improved. The real cost has been to the heart of hospitality; the soul of the industry looks wounded. The hospitality industry will need to step up with re_training and other employee enrichment programs to restore morale, motivation, and up-skill its workforce.

A Lot More

A few other topics that are really worth contemplating further (non-exhaustive and not equally-weighted): Cybersecurity, data privacy, automation, artificial intelligence, shifting appetites and demographics, new innovations in full_service restaurants,

dynamic pricing, franchise development activity, and so much more.

Let's Put Our Heads Together

If ever there is a time to seek experienced and objective outside help, it must be now. There are just too many things moving around the strategy board and onto the corporate radars than can be adequately addressed without some ad hoc support for precision intelligence, custom strategy, and accelerated implementation. Prepare for 2024 while we're still in 2023.

About the Author: Our founder and chief strategist, [Aaron Allen](#), is a third-generation restaurateur and literally grew up in his family's seafood restaurant. He counts himself lucky that he knew what he wanted to do with his life from so early on. He has served as a CEO confidant and senior advisor to industry leaders with tens of thousands of locations and millions of managers and employees in their downstream influence. In total, he and his team have represented more than half of the largest 400 chains, and Aaron has personally led boots-on-the-ground engagements in 70 countries for clients ranging from start-ups to multi-billion-dollar, multinational companies.

Aaron has also become a go-to [restaurant industry expert](#) for media outlets including the Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg, CNBC, BBC, the Guardian, Forbes, Fortune, Time, Entrepreneur, Smart Money, Mashable, BuzzFeed, Oprah.com, the Washington Post, National Public Radio, and hundreds of other influential news sources. In 2018, he was honored as a [Top Voice on LinkedIn](#), joining an esteemed group of thinkers, strategists, and influencers. His publicity skills have helped land clients features on the Food Network, Top Chef, the Travel Channel, Bravo, and Fine Living Network as well as a number of pilot program invitations.

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11	Elijah Sleight (NY Based)		3150 Hwy 3	Newnan	30263	678 423-8694		duffsnewnan@gmail.com
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13	Daniel Kim, (they have		3492 Satel	Duluth	30097	770 302-22 Late Nov - 1		cs@boxete.com
14	Owners De The old Sm		282 Norma	Valdosta	31601	850 629-40 TBD checke		Wahooseafoodgrill.tally@gmail.com
15	Owner Sha (right now		495 White	Atlanta	30303	404 963-14 TBD checked		early Nov

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New normal from page 1

person taking their order.

11. Phone calls must be answered as promptly as possible, and in a professional manner – Thank you for calling (name of restaurant), this is (name), how may I help you? – and upon taking the order, Thank you again for calling (name of restaurant), please contact me, should you experience any problems with your order, we do appreciate your business, again thank you.

12. Pay attention to how the menu items are placed in containers to ensure they look attractive when customer opens the containers.

13. Include extra containers of sauces & dressings, as when reheated, many menu items tend to dry out and a lot of customers just like extra sauce & dressings.

14. Be sure to track all orders and hold accountable all delivery drivers.

15. Follow up with all customers later that day or at the latest, the next morning.

16. A good rule of thumb for managing expectations is to under-promise and overdeliver.

17. Include a list of future specials and of course, the take-out & delivery menu with all orders.

18. Utilize the restaurant's loyalty program to communicate with and market to the database of loyal customers and offer specials specifically to this list.

19. Create a simple frequent diner program – for example: every fourth order receives a \$10 or 10% off discount.

20. Build order tickets by offering a multi-meal discount – for example: place a second or third order at the same time and receive 5% and 10% off respectively.

21. Offer an additional entrée with orders over a certain amount – for example: spend \$50 and receive an order of spaghetti & meatballs at no additional charge.

22. Market on social media with pictures of menu items, specials, etc.

23. Market on social media with video of owner showing cleanliness of the kitchen, food preparation, personal message of care and thanks, etc.

24. Document all processes and methods regarding take-out & delivery to incorporate into restaurant operations to enhance business when restaurant is open for dine-in customers.

25. Communicate, communicate, communicate with staff on changes AND progress. Celebrate small wins! **TR**

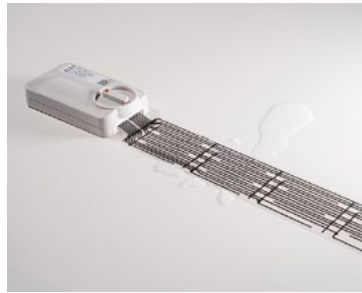
About the Author: Passionate about fueling entrepreneurial spirit, and helping current & aspiring entrepreneurs from all walks of life achieve their personal, family, and business goals! #visionary #thoughtleader #entrepreneur. You can email Paul Segreto at paul@acceler8success.com. You can find his website is at www.acceler8successcafe.com.

What's Going On from page 8

details on what is coming in visit the website at Norawpb.com.



Luca Lagotto and Luca Mercato Lagotto are the latest concepts from Birmingham's Pihakis Restaurant Group. The establishment is a restaurant and a market that recently opened in Homewood. Luca Lagotto, is a full-service Italian restaurant. Executive Chefs Rita Bernhardt offers a menu of traditional dishes. They include fresh pastas and pizzas and other dishes. They are locally sourcing their ingredients as much as they can and also using imported specialty ingredients. They also have a beverage program offers classic cocktails, creative concoctions and an extensive wine list. Their new Luca Mercato Lagotto is literally next door and is a market that selling a selection of prepared foods, wines and specialty products found mostly in Italy.



in their infancy, allowing for swift remediation to help reduce damage and further problems. "We're thrilled to be teaming up with MachineQ to provide a best-in-breed early water leak detection solution leveraging their IoT network connectivity platform," said Matt Johnson, LAIIEE Co-founder and CEO. "MachineQ already provides leading brands in the hospital-ity, food and beverage, and life sciences industries with scalable low-power IoT solutions, so it made natural sense to team up and offer our water leak solution to their existing customers and companies seeking innovative solutions." Visit MachineQ.com.



Today's Restaurant invites you to submit your information for the What's Going On column at any time. E-mail your company, product or event info to terri@trnusa.com and try to keep the word count around 100 words (or less). It's a great way to get free publicity for your company product, service or upcoming events! While you're online check out the **Today's Restaurant website** for advertising opportunities, our networking groups, foodservice news, back issue PDFs, classified ads and much more!



Early water leak detection solution provider LAIIEE announced that it has teamed up with MachineQ, a Comcast Company, to accelerate the adoption of its Severn WLD™ solution across the US. This collaboration offers a vital advantage to commercial building owners and operators to help detect leaks

TR Today's Restaurant

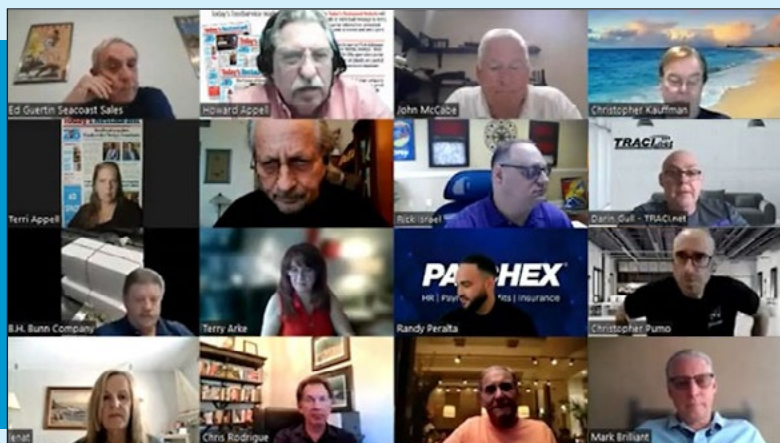
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