

# Today's Restaurant

THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY AUTHORITY

VOLUME 31

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# The hiring & staffing dividend: How people power restaurant profitability

New National Restaurant Association insights show how strong onboarding, empowered managers, and smart technology fuel restaurant performance and growth

Washington, D.C. – The greatest investment the restaurant industry can make for its future longevity is in its workforce—a finding supported by the National Restaurant Association 2026 Research Insights: Hiring and Staffing paper, supported by Workday. With more than 10 percent of the U.S. workforce employed in restaurants, the report indicates that restaurants can achieve the highest workforce return on investment by maximizing their business's technological efficiency and developing their management teams to be tomorrow's industry leaders.

"Restaurants are a cornerstone of America's workforce, developing skills that carry into other industries and offering viable careers across more than seventy roles," said **Michelle Korsmo, President & CEO of the National Restaurant Association.** "This report highlights how investing in people—through strong hiring, manager

development, and supportive technology—strengthens the guest experience and reinforces restaurants' role as a key driver of the U.S. economy."



### The real cost of being understaffed

A hospitality-focused industry that serves millions each year, restaurants face an immediate and costly challenge from understaffing. Nearly 8 in 10 short-staffed operators said it significantly limits their ability to grow and succeed. One operator estimated that being short by just one team member could cost hundreds of dollars per shift. Another restaurant leader said that consistently running one employee short could reduce

annual sales by thousands of dollars if persistent.

The operational toll is equally significant. According to the report, nearly half of understaffed restaurants could not operate at full capacity, and 43 percent postponed expansion plans or modified their menus. What's more, more than one-third (34%) reduced their hours, and 1 in 5 closed on days they would normally be open.

"Understaffing is not a marginal inconvenience—it is a material drag on growth, service quality, and sales," said Dr. Chad Moutray, Chief Economist at the National Restaurant Association. "Being short just one employee can cost a restaurant thousands of dollars in annual sales. The restaurants best positioned to grow are those that treat workforce decisions as a business imperative."

See **DIVIDEND** page 12

# Why restaurant owners hate Yelp

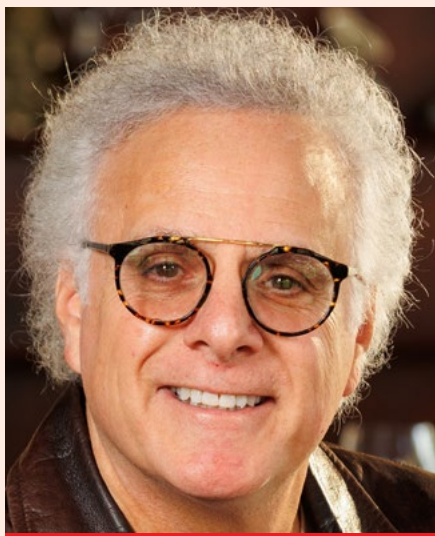
By **Benson Fischer**

Founder/CEO of ZivZo Marketing Group

Every restaurateur has a large library of stories about the "1-star Yelp nightmare"—reviews triggered by minor "non-issues" like table placement, ambient lighting, or music volume. In 99% of these cases, the problem could have been solved instantly if the guest had simply spoken to their server or requested a manager.

Unfortunately, we live in an era where direct communication has been replaced by digital venting on Yelp. Instead of speaking up in the moment, many guests remain silent, leave the building, and then write a 2,000-word manifesto from their smartphone.

The absurdity doesn't stop at minor inconveniences. Owners frequently face 1-star Yelp reviews for items they don't even serve, or worse, targeted attacks. It is an open secret that Yelp is often weaponized by competitors looking to cripple the opposition or by disgruntled ex-employees seeking revenge. To make matters worse, Yelp's removal process is notoriously difficult, leaving



Benson Fischer

ten minutes, they can tank your rating for the next six months. Yelp rarely removes these even when we provide proof of the threat."

### The Yelp "Pay-to-Play" Game

The most enduring grievance is what owners call the "**Yelp Sales Call Curse.**" The narrative is remarkably consistent across the restaurant industry: a restaurant receives a flurry of calls from Yelp sales reps pushing monthly advertising packages that can cost upwards of **\$1,000.**

When the owner says "no," they often report a sudden, "coincidental" shift in their page's appearance. Positive reviews from regulars are moved to the "**Not Recommended**" folder, while a stinging 1-star review from three months ago is pinned to the top. While Yelp maintains that its sales and review-filtering teams are strictly separated, the anecdotal evidence from owners is so overwhelming that the trust gap has become a canyon.

### The Algorithm that Silences the "Regular"

As an owner, there is nothing more frustrating than seeing a glowing, detailed review from a weekly customer, someone you know by name, get flagged as "unhelpful" by an algorithm.

♦ **The "Elite" Bias:** Yelp's software prioritizes "power users" and "Elites." This means a tourist who visits once and is in a bad mood can carry more weight than a local who has eaten at your establishment fifty times but doesn't post often.

♦ **The Ghosting of Positivity:** Owners spend thousands on ingredients and staff training to earn those 5-star mentions. When Yelp's AI hides

them, it feels like the platform is literally deleting the business's hard-earned "digital equity."

### Yelp Data Cannibalism

Restaurants also despise how Yelp uses their data to help their competitors. If a restaurant doesn't pay for "Enhanced Profiles," Yelp will often:

Place Ads for Competitors: Right at the top of your own business page, distracting your potential customers.

Remove "Request a Quote" buttons: Or hide essential contact info, making it harder for the customer to reach the restaurant directly without going through a Yelp-monetized channel.

### The ROI Problem

Many owners have realized that Yelp's actual traffic share has plummeted, down from 15% of referral traffic in 2018 to just 3% today. Between Google Maps' dominance and the rise of TikTok for food discovery, many owners feel that Yelp is a "dinosaur" that is only staying relevant by aggressively squeezing the businesses still trapped on its platform.

See **YELP** page 12



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# Appell Pie

## Are you losing sleep over high costs?

Howard Appell ♦ Today's Restaurant Publisher

### How Restaurants Can Reduce Costs in Today's Economy

Restaurants can reduce costs in today's economy by tightening operations, renegotiating supplier terms, and using technology to improve efficiency.

Rising food prices, labor shortages, and shifting consumer habits continue to challenge restaurants across the country. To stay profitable, operators are taking a closer look at how they run their businesses and where strategic adjustments can make the biggest impact.

One of the most effective approaches has been simplifying the menu. By focusing on high-margin, best-selling items, restaurants reduce waste, streamline prep, and improve consistency. At the same time, many operators are using smarter scheduling tools to match labor to actual demand, helping control one of the industry's largest expenses. Companies like X-Shift AI, are assisting operators to utilize AI tools to accomplish successful, efficient scheduling in less time than manual systems.

A major area of focus is operational efficiency. Cross-training employees allows a smaller team to handle more responsibilities, while smarter scheduling tools help match labor to actual traffic patterns. Even small changes, like switching to LED lighting, installing smart thermostats, or upgrading to energy-efficient equipment, can create meaningful savings over time.

Purchasing strategies are evolving as well. Restaurants are renegotiating supplier contracts, joining group purchasing programs, and adopting digital inventory systems that track usage in real time. These tools help prevent over-ordering and spoilage—two hidden costs that add up quickly.

Kevin Anderson of Strategic Supply Chain Partners, a specialized supply chain and procurement advisory firm serving hospitality, casinos, and restaurant groups nationwide, said "We focus on driving financial improvement through disciplined procurement strategy, contract optimization, and vendor accountability across high-volume, commodity-driven categories. Our



*The goal is helping operators ensure their costs remain competitive so more dollars stay in the business.*

work is operator-led, data-driven, and built around measurable impact to the P&L and is a pay-for-performance fee structure that eliminates client financial risk."

ERA Group works as a fractional purchasing and cost optimization resource for operators, typically beginning with broadline food distributors like Sysco and US Foods. "Foodservice pricing is highly negotiated and often drifts over time based on purchasing patterns, product mix, and distributor margin strategy. Two operators buying similar products can pay materially different prices depending on how those relationships are structured and managed." Said Michael Smith, Consulting

See APPELL PIE page 14

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# What's Going On

Important new products, corporate news and industry events



Taylor County, Florida is home to one of the largest and most popular BBQ Festivals in the state and southeastern U.S.

Smokin' in the Pines BBQ Festival to be held this year in September.

This event gives out over \$15,000 in cash prizes for the following BBQ Events:

- ◆ OPEN BBQ Competition (\$10,000 in cash & prizes)
- ◆ Sauces of Honor Competition sponsored by National BBQ News (\$1,000 in cash & prizes)
- ◆ People's Choice (\$500 for 1st Place – No Entry Fee)
- ◆ KIDZ-QUE Competition (Ages 6-13)

Thousands of dollars in cash prizes are awarded during the weekend to those in all the competitions. Visitors can sample BBQ at the many sampling stations or they can be a judge in the People's Choice portion of the event where they can try over 35 different kinds of pulled pork. Contact is below to find out dates:

Smokin In The Pines BBQ, Dawn Perez, Executive Director  
203 Forest Park Dr. Perry, FL, 850-584-5366, [TaylorChamber@gtcom.net](mailto:TaylorChamber@gtcom.net)

## Closed Restaurants

**Rodney Scott's BBQ** - The Pihakis Group founded by Nick Pihakis has closed over a dozen restaurants in Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee.

**Brandon's Chicken and Taco Loco Bar and Grill** in Tampa is now closed. They still operate a Food Truck.

**Pasghetti**, at 229 62nd Ave N in St. Petersburg, has closed down after operating as a family-friendly Italian

fast-casual restaurant.

**City Cellar Wine Bar & Grill in West Palm Beach** has closed. Late May was the last month for the restaurant located at 700 S Rosemary Ave.

**2 Chef's Souparee in Lake Worth Beach** is now closed.

**Pelican & Pig**, located at 1010 Gallatin Ave in Nashville has served its final meal. The restaurant opened in 2019 and was one of Nashville's farm-to-table dinner

destinations. It was owned by Nick and Audra Guidry.

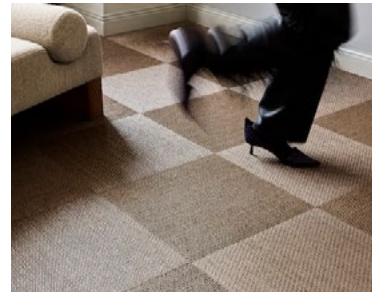
**Slow Hand Coffee + Bakeshop** has also closed in Nashville. The cafe had been serving customers for about 8 years. It was under the umbrella of the Pelican & Pig above.

**McCormick & Schmick's**, which had more than 100 locations during its tenure, now has 15 U.S. restaurants listed as open. The chain is over 45 years old. The closures mark 80% of it's total locations.

**All the Smokey Bones Bar and Fire Grill restaurants across the country** closed abruptly in April. This includes the three that still remained in Florida, where it started more than a quarter century ago.

**Wendy's has closed more than 40 Florida locations** in the last year as part of a nationwide effort to drop underperforming stores.

**US dirty soda chain Swig has signed a 25-unit franchise development deal in South Florida.** The agreement



was signed with multi-unit operators James and Spiro Laskaris and their business partner Stephen Attard. Under the deal, the partners will open Swig stores in several areas, including Palm Beach, Stuart & Port St Lucie. Swig's president is Todd Smith.

◆◆◆◆  
◆ **Bolon, the Swedish design company known for high performance woven flooring, introduces the latest evolution of BKB, now available in North America through Matter Surfaces.** This update brings renewed focus to one of Bolon's most established and iconic product lines, aligning its materiality and performance with the needs of today's contract environments. First introduced in 1993, BKB was Bolon's first woven flooring offering and remains a cornerstone of the brand's portfolio. Defined by a restrained palette of neutrals, including beige, grey, brown, and black,



◆ **US dirty soda chain Swig has signed a 25-unit franchise development deal in South Florida.** The agreement

See **WHAT'S GOING ON** page 6

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Coaching for success

# Be what your employees need — and want — you to be

John Tschohl ♦ Today's Restaurant Contributor

If you have a leadership role in your company, coaching should be your major responsibility. It's critical that you step up to the plate, keep your eye on the ball, and do everything you can to build and retain a winning team.

A coach brings all the disparate

parts of team members together in a cohesive unit by providing insight and instruction. When you bring out the best in everyone you manage, you foster their success—and yours.

Coaching focuses on motivation, teamwork, expectations, and corroboration. Modern managers

as coaches work as team leaders as well as team members. They are approachable, open-minded, and accessible.

One of the first steps toward becoming a successful coach is to recognize each of your employees as individuals. What motivates them? What are their interests and aspirations? What inspires them? What are their fears? Have open and honest conversations with them so you know their goals, fears, and concerns.

Hold your employees to high standards, no matter what positions they hold or what functions they perform. That means you must communicate clear expectations so they understand their responsibilities and are able to work toward a set of concrete benchmarks, goals, and deadlines. Be specific about your expectations. Set a quarterly schedule to assess their work and where they are on the road to meeting their goals.

at their peak levels. Direct them to workshops, online courses, tuition reimbursement programs, and books that will improve their skills. Training must be consistent so they can continue to improve their skills and increase their enthusiasm. When you invest in training your employees, you are sending a message that you value them and their contributions to the team and to the company.

Motivate your employees. Praise and recognition—not money—are the strongest motivators you can use to improve their productivity and strengthen their loyalty to your team and your company. It's also critical that you empower them; trust them to do what is right for your customers and your company.

Cheer them on. Remember that everyone likes to be recognized for what they do. Praise your team members for their accomplishments—and do that in front of everyone on your team. That will not only fuel the efforts of the one you are praising, it will spur on the rest of the team to be better and do better. Just as your employees need food every day, they need recognition every day. That recognition must be genuine, specific, timely, and sincere. An example is this: "Kathy, thanks for doing such a great job on the Gunther project."

Occasionally, you might need to coach an employee out of your organization. That, of course, is a difficult task, but it's necessary to create a successful team. When you eliminate non-performing or underperforming employees, you send a strong message to the rest of the team. You are letting them know they can trust you to make tough decisions.

Finally, remember this: Most employees leave their jobs because their managers and supervisors are not coaching, nurturing, recognizing, or motivating them.

For more info on John Tschohl and the Service Quality Institute, log onto [www.customer-service.com](http://www.customer-service.com).



*Cheer them on.  
Remember that  
everyone likes to be  
recognized for what  
they do.*

As a coach, you must also be available for your team members. Be a mentor. Solicit their concerns and ideas. What roadblocks are preventing them from doing their best work? What can you do to eliminate those roadblocks? Ask them how you can help them achieve their goals. Meet with them on a regular basis to assess their performance and to offer a plan their next steps to success.

Training is critical when building a winning team. Give your employees the tools they need to perform

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# The 24-year old helping restaurants win back customers they never knew they lost

How a young Charlotte founder is rethinking what it means for small businesses to show up online.

Ata Tatman started his first business when he was 13 years old. By the time most kids were figuring out high school, he had already scaled that company to eight employees. It was the experience that planted something in him that never left, the belief that you do not wait for permission, you just start.

Today, at 24, Ata is the co-founder of Cornucopia AI, a Charlotte based start-up building software that helps small business owners across the trades and hospitality industries do something most of them are losing customers because of. Show up consistently online.

The product, called REV, is an AI powered platform that automatically creates branded social media content and posts it across Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X every single day. For a restaurant owner who is on the line every night, an HVAC technician who is on a job site, or an auto shop owner who is buried in customers, REV runs in the background while they run their actual business.

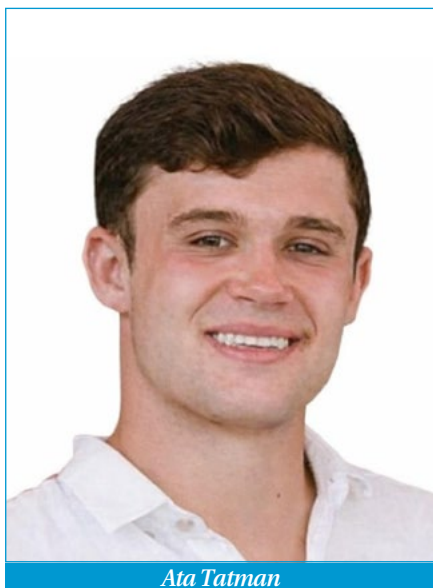
Ata and his co-founder Kesavasai met as seniors at Virginia Tech. They had almost no classes left and started spending their time talking about a problem they kept seeing in the small businesses around them. Owners who were great at what they did but had completely vanished from the internet. Their websites looked dated. Their Instagram posts were months old. Their Google reviews went unanswered.

Before writing a single line of code, Ata and Kesavasai spent two years

## Industry Spotlight

### Ata Tatman

Co-Founder of Cornucopia AI



Ata Tatman

interviewing more than 200 small business owners across the country. They asked the same questions. Why do you not post more? What is stopping you? What would actually help?

The answers were nearly identical every time. Owners knew they needed to show up online. They simply never had time. And when they did try, they did not know what to post or how to make it look professional.

This is the exact moment a customer finds them, looks them up, sees

nothing recent, and silently calls a competitor instead. The owner never finds out. According to widely cited industry research, 74 percent of consumers check a business's social media before deciding to call. For a restaurant relying on Tuesday night reservations or a service business waiting on the next emergency call, that statistic is the difference between a busy week and a quiet one.

Cornucopia AI's mission is to fix that for the small business owners who have been completely overlooked by the technology industry. Most AI tools today are built for white collar professionals working at desks. Almost none of them have been built seriously for restaurant owners, plumbers, electricians, mechanics, or the people who actually keep local economies running.


REV currently serves a growing list of paying customers across HVAC, auto repair, professional services, and now hospitality. Aaron, an auto shop owner

in Charlotte, was spending 40 hours a month manually managing his shop's social media before adopting REV. After using the platform, he is down to eight hours a month, with more consistent posting and better-looking content than he ever managed by hand.

That kind of result is what Ata wants to bring to restaurant owners next. He believes the restaurant industry, more than almost any other, lives and dies on visibility. The competitor down the street posting their daily special every morning is not a better restaurant. They are simply more visible. Ata wants to level that playing field for the operator who is too busy expediting tickets to think about Instagram.

Cornucopia AI has been accepted into the AWS Build Accelerator, the NVIDIA Inception Program, and LAUNCH Founders University.

It is the kind of story that makes you want to root for them. Two young founders, both raised on the belief that hard work and customer obsession beat shortcuts every time, building software for the businesses everyone else has forgotten.

And from the looks of where they are headed, the restaurants and small businesses who back them now will be glad they did. 

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# What's Going On from page 3

it continues to provide a flexible foundation across workplace and hospitality interiors. The latest update introduces four new sisal-inspired colorways that build on the product's signature texture while expanding its range. Sisal Umber, Sisal Loam, Sisal Fawn, and Sisal Dune add warmth and depth, giving designers more flexibility when working with layered, tonal schemes. Matter Surfaces is a leading national provider of high-performance surface solutions, offering a comprehensive portfolio of commercial flooring and architectural products tailored for a wide range of markets—including corporate, education, healthcare, hospitality, and retail. With a commitment to innovation, sustainability, and customer partnership, Matter Surfaces delivers expertly curated product lines and consultative support to architects, designers, and contractors across the United States. To learn more, visit [mattersurfaces.com](https://mattersurfaces.com).



corridor, and Columbia. "Focusing on the Southeast markets is big for Your Pie right now, especially with the growing population and demand for something new in those areas," said Ken Caldwell, CEO & Head of Development of Your Pie. "We believe that these markets resonate exceptionally well with our brand and will give us the opportunity to expand in communities that value concepts like Your Pie." Founded in Athens, Georgia in 2008, visit [YourPie.com](https://YourPie.com).

◆ **16 Handles**, the upscale frozen yogurt and dessert franchise known for its modern design and viral flavors, is bringing its modern, tech-forward concept to the West Coast, announcing its first-ever expansion into California with eight units planned across some of the state's most high-demand markets. Initial locations are already in development across the LA Metro area, the San Fernando Valley, the San Francisco Bay Area and North San Diego. "We've always seen California as a natural second home for 16 Handles, but we wanted to enter the market the right way, with strong operators and lots of momentum," said

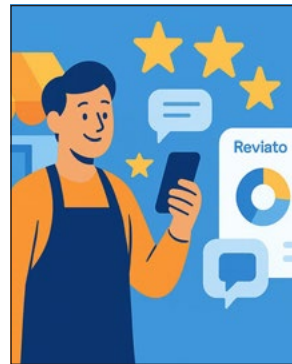


16 Handles CEO Neil Hershman. "Our marketing and nationwide growth has created a viral resurgence of frozen yogurt, and we think it's time for the west coast to try the world's best frozen yogurt and soft serve."

◆◆◆◆  
**Timber Pizza Co.**, the award-winning, neighborhood-oriented pizza brand, has signed a new franchise development deal to bring its signature pies to the Atlanta metro area. The agreement includes plans for two locations, officially marking the brand's entry into the Georgia market as it continues its strategic expansion across the Southeast. Recently, the brand was also recognized on [Pizza Marketplace's 2026 Top 100 Movers & Shakers list](#), further underscoring its growing momentum. The first location is slated for late 2026 or early 2027, with a second unit to follow. Development for this agreement covers the Alpharetta and Cumming areas, and the brand is now looking to award additional territories throughout the greater Atlanta region as it continues building momentum in the market. "Atlanta is a dynamic, fast-growing city with a deep appreciation for great food and local businesses," said Chris Brady, co-founder of Timber Pizza Co. "We're excited to partner with someone who not only understands the market, but who is also committed to creating

spaces where people can gather and connect. That local passion is a huge part of what makes Timber special." In 2014, Andrew Dana and Chris Brady started Timber Pizza Company in their off-hours with a pizza oven, a '67 Chevy pickup truck, and a deep love of dough.

◆◆◆◆  
 ◆ **Reviato** has published a set of free review benchmark resources for restaurant and hospitality operators who want a clearer way to read guest feedback across local markets. The



benchmark pages help operators compare common guest feedback themes by city and business type. Instead of treating online reviews as isolated comments, Reviato organizes the work around recurring patterns: what guests praise, what they complain about, and which issues deserve attention first. Current public destinations include restaurant insight pages for New York, Chicago, Miami, Las Vegas, and San Francisco. Restaurant operators can use the free resources to prepare for review operations work, benchmark a city category, or decide which feedback themes deserve deeper analysis. The Reviato insights index is available at <https://www.reviato.com/insights>. The Google reviews calculator is available at <https://www.reviato.com/tools/google-reviews-calculator>. Reviato is hospitality-focused review

See WGO page 12

◆ **Your Pie, Pizza, Brews & Gelato** - the Ischia-inspired pizza brand known for its customizable brick-oven pizzas and open-kitchen dining experience, is targeting consistent, scalable growth across the Southeast, with a focus on the Metro Atlanta, the Chattanooga-Knoxville-Nashville

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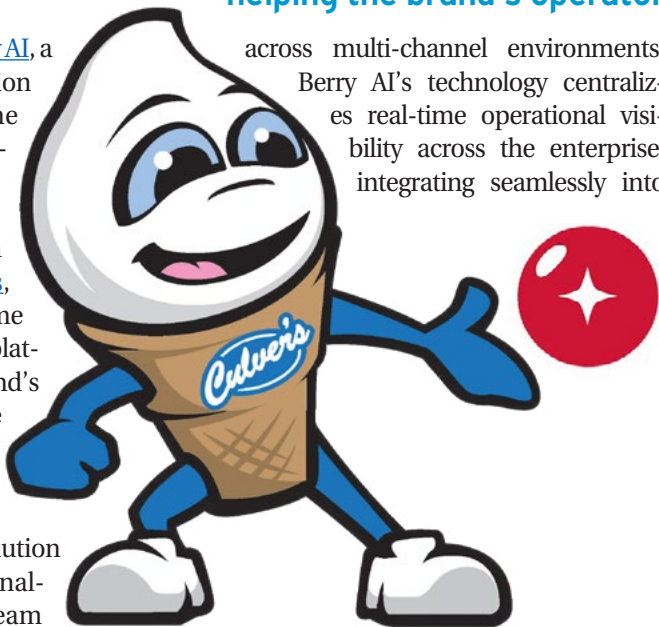
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# Berry AI and Culver's announce AI deployment across 1,000+ restaurants

By partnering with the largest Vision AI provider in the U.S. QSR industry, Culver's restaurants gain real-time visibility; helping the brand's operators make better decisions, faster.

San Jose, CA - [Berry AI](#), a leading provider of Vision AI technology for the quick-service restaurant industry, recently announced a nationwide partnership with [Culver's restaurants](#), deploying its real-time visibility intelligence platform across the brand's entire portfolio: more than 1,000 locations nationwide. Berry AI is the most widely deployed Vision AI solution in the QSR sector, signaling the rapid mainstream adoption of AI-powered operational infrastructure across the industry.



across multi-channel environments, Berry AI's technology centralizes real-time operational visibility across the enterprise, integrating seamlessly into

decisions that improve speed and ensure accuracy."

Culver's joins a growing portfolio of QSR brands nationwide leveraging Berry AI's AI-enabled cameras

throughput. These measurable gains are a critical priority for high-volume QSR operators across drive-thru, dine-in, and pickup channels.

"The scale of this deployment underscores how fast the quick service restaurant industry is moving from AI experimentation to AI standardization," said Eric Lam, CEO of Berry AI. "Culver's' commitment to operational intelligence at this scale signals a bigger shift: Vision AI is core infrastructure for modern QSR's."

**About Berry AI:** Berry AI is the leading provider of Vision AI technology designed to help quick-service restaurants optimize performance through real-time visibility and analytics. Its platform transforms routine video data into operational intelligence that identifies service bottlenecks, enhances guest experiences, and fuels measurable gains across the enterprise. Berry AI's solutions are trusted by top QSR brands nationwide. To learn more, visit [www.berry-ai.com](http://www.berry-ai.com).

**About Culver's:** For 40 years, Culver's - [Culvers.com](http://Culvers.com) - guests have been treated to cooked-to-order food made with farm-fresh ingredients and served with a smile. The ever-expanding franchise system now numbers 1,000 family-owned and operated restaurants in 26 states. The restaurants' nationally recognized customer service is based on small-town, Midwestern values, genuine friendliness and an unwavering commitment to quality. Signature items include the award-winning ButterBurger, made from fresh, never frozen beef, and Fresh Frozen Custard, including the famous Flavor of the Day program.

## Berry AI

and proprietary analytics to transform enhanced visibility into actionable operational intelligence. Across deployments, partners have reported up to 70% jumps in drive thru comps, 20-40% reductions in drive-thru service times, and up to 20% improvements in

existing workflows and POS ecosystems. This equips operators at every level with the intelligence needed to make faster decisions and maintain consistent performance.

Delivering real, genuine hospitality and a consistently excellent experience requires deep insight into every interaction," said Rich Modjeski, Culver's Chief Operating Officer. "Berry AI's vision technology will elevate our guests' experiences by empowering our restaurant teams to make informed

*"Delivering real, genuine hospitality and a consistently excellent experience requires deep insight into every interaction."*

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# THE MESS HALL

## Featured City San Francisco

San Francisco's newest market hall is coming to The Presidio this month. The Mess Hall at The Presidio

will offer a cafe, full bar, three distinct all-day food concepts, and a gourmet retail market. Located at 201 Halleck St., it will feature Boda, as one of three restaurants. **Boda** will offer Korean fried chicken and other tasty Korean dishes. Smashburgers, hoagies and vegetarian sandwiches will be on the menu at **Breadwinner**, a restaurant that will also debut inside the Mess Hall, which is located in the former U.S. Army building located on top of Tunnel Tops park, the newest part of the Presidio with wrap-around views of Alcatraz, the Golden Gate Bridge and the city. **Dayboat Seafood** is the latest concept. The building will also have a full bar, a café featuring San Francisco's Wrecking Ball Coffee Roasters and a market.



Loquat, famous for its Jewish-diaspora pastries and Babka will open a 2nd location in 2027. The 2nd Loquat will be located at 4555 California Street.

in San Francisco. A changing lineup of breads from across the Jewish diaspora, including Iraqi garwag and Moroccan harcha will be on the menu. It is under the umbrella of Four Barrel Mill, with partners Tal Mor and Jodi Geren.

◆◆◆◆

A new Taiwanese fried chicken spot is now open in San Francisco,



**Mission Local** reports. **Zhengxin Chicken Steak** sells fried chicken, milk tea, skewers, rice combos, and more at this Mission storefront. This is the second Bay Area location for the restaurant, which joins another location in Milpitas. The restaurant is located at 3230 22nd Street.



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# RESTAURANT CITY SAN FRANCISCO

## Tadich Grill



San Francisco, CA - Located in the heart of San Francisco's Financial District, at 240 California Street, Tadich Grill is the oldest, continuously run restaurant in California, and third oldest in the United States.

In 1849, Nikola Budrovich, Frano Kosta, and Antonio Gasparich, three immigrants from Croatia, set up a tent on Long Wharf and posted a sign on it that read Coffee Stand. Long Wharf was a pier that reached half a mile into the Bay.

Hundreds of sailing ships were tied up there, and the pier was lined with hastily built shops, saloons, markets, and gambling dens. Coffee Stand served fresh fish grilled over charcoal to the merchants, sailors, and argonauts who frequented the pier. At one point, a ship carrying a load of iron tied up at the pier, and the crew immediately deserted the ship to go off in search of gold.

Shortly thereafter, the Coffee Stand tent was replaced by a shanty made of corrugated iron. At the time, the shore of San Francisco Bay lapped at the edge of Montgomery Street. But bay fill was expanding the city eastward, and Long Wharf was turning into an extension of Commercial Street. In this reclamation process, Coffee Stand was obliged to relocate to the New World Market, the city's central produce market, at Commercial and Leidesdorff streets and was renamed New World Coffee Stand.

Before long, success required larger quarters, and the Croatians moved their place to Commercial and Kearny and promoted it from Stand to Saloon.

### Today

Tadich Grill ownership and management pride themselves on a staff reflective of the rich heritage and tradition of the restaurant. "Our servers know your name and our bartenders remember how you like your martini. Our Chef procures the freshest ingredients daily and prepares your order with the same care delivered over the past century and a half." 

Jeff Hanak, a partner at [Liholiho Yacht Club](#), [Good Good Culture Club](#) and Nopalito, and Connor Bruce, will open **Kitchen Commons**, a **cooking-focused store**, this fall at 130 Clement Street in San Francisco.



San Francisco now has a celiac-safe Italian restaurant called **Clementina**. It's the latest project of restaurateurs Gianluca Legrottaglie and Viviana Devoto, who opened Montesacro Pinseria in SoMa over a decade ago, along with chef Giorgio Brunella. Clementina is located at 343 Clement Street.

**Sightglass Coffee**, the San Francisco-based specialty coffee pioneer known for small-batch roasting and close relationships with growers, has opened a new café in Berkeley in May. Serving a full menu of high-quality espresso beverages alongside a rotating selection of blends and single-origin coffees. The Berkeley cafe marks Sightglass's first new location in six years — since its Los Angeles expansion



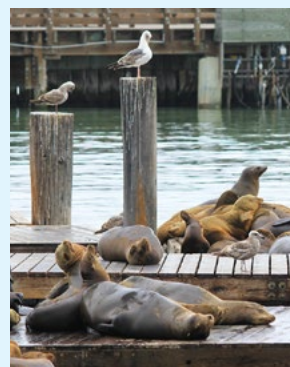
in 2020 — and its first Bay Area opening in nearly a decade. As part of the Helen Diller Anchor House model, a portion of the café's rent will support the building's mission, helping fund housing and scholarships for UC Berkeley transfer students. The new café is located at 2169 University Ave.



**Today's Restaurant** invites you to submit your information for the [What'sGoingOn](#) column at anytime. Just e-mail your company, product or event info to [terri@trnusa.com](mailto: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! And while you're online please check out the **Today's Restaurant website** for

our current advertising opportunities, the TRN Network groups, food-service news, back issue PDFs, classified ads and much more!

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# Decision Logic launches embedded AI that acts as an assistant store manager

New AI transforms operations by detecting issues, delivering instant answers & driving consistency across every location

Omaha, NE - Decision Logic announces the launch of Decision Logic AI, a fully embedded artificial intelligence solution designed specifically for multi-location restaurant brands. Built directly into the Decision Logic platform, the new AI acts as an always-on operational assistant—continuously monitoring performance, surfacing issues before they impact profitability, and guiding managers with clear, actionable next steps.

Unlike traditional dashboards or add-on analytics tools, Decision Logic AI works proactively analyzing over 25 critical operational metrics across sales, labor, inventory, and performance in real time. The result: restaurant managers spend less time searching for problems and more time running their business.

“Restaurant managers weren’t hired to analyze spreadsheets—they were hired to lead teams and deliver great guest experiences,” said Keegan Conrey, CEO of Decision Logic. “Decision Logic AI flips the model. Instead of managers working in the system, the system works for them; watching every metric, flagging issues early, and telling them exactly what to do next. It’s like giving every store its best assistant manager, built right into the platform.” Conrey shared,

“Decision Logic’s goal for this product is to get managers out of the technology so they can spend more time on the restaurant floor with their team members and guests.”

## A new standard for restaurant operations

Decision Logic AI introduces a fundamentally new category in restaurant technology: embedded,



# Decision Logic

proactive operations automation. It is not a standalone chatbot or reporting layer—it is deeply integrated into the workflows restaurant teams already rely on. At its core, the platform delivers three transformative outcomes:

### Problems find you

Continuous monitoring identifies anomalies and trends automatically, sending prioritized alerts with clear explanations and recommended actions—often 1–3 days earlier than traditional reporting.

### Answers in seconds

Managers can ask any operational question in plain language and receive immediate, data-backed answers —

complete with visualizations — without navigating complex reports.

### Every store runs like your best store

Built-in benchmarking and AI-driven coaching ensure consistent performance across locations, reducing variability and improving execution at scale.

These capabilities translate into measurable business impact, including

frontline restaurant teams in mind. The interface delivers plain-language insights, guided recommendations, and zero reliance on technical expertise; making advanced operational intelligence accessible to every manager, regardless of experience level.

For above-store leaders and corporate teams, the system provides real-time visibility across all locations, highlighting underperformance, surfacing trends early, and enabling faster, data-driven decision-making; without increasing headcount or operational complexity. **TR**

**About Decision Logic:** Decision Logic – provides restaurant operators with intelligent tools to streamline operations, improve performance, and drive consistency across multi-unit brands. With the introduction of Decision Logic AI, the company continues to redefine how restaurants leverage technology to operate smarter, faster, and more effectively. For more information, visit the company online at [DecisionLogic.io](http://DecisionLogic.io).

a **77% reduction in time spent reviewing metrics; 95% of critical issues surfaced automatically**, and an average **\$14,000 annual ROI per store**.

### Built for operators not analysts

Decision Logic AI was designed with



## The future of healthcare benefits starts with ICHRA

Sven Jensen ♦ Founder of Pro-Tier

If we were building employee healthcare benefits from the ground up today, we wouldn’t design the same system we’ve been using for decades. We’d design something modern—something flexible, personal, and predictable. In short, we’d design ICHRA.

### Why the old system doesn’t work anymore

Traditional group insurance was built for a different era—when people stayed in the same job for 20 years, worked in the same office, and expected one-size-fits-all coverage. But today’s workforce is different. Employees move jobs more often, work remotely, and want options that match their stage of life.

For employers, the old system is costly, complex, and full of compliance hurdles. Year after year, premiums climb, coverage stays rigid, and businesses feel like they have no control.

### ICHRA: A smarter, simpler model

The ICHRA (Individual Coverage Health Reimbursement Arrangement) flips the script. Instead of paying for a single group plan, you decide how much to contribute toward each employee’s health coverage. Then, they choose their own plan—one that actually fits their needs.

Maybe one employee wants low premiums and another prefers more coverage for their family. Both can get what they want, and you only pay what makes sense for your business.

### Benefits for everyone

For employers, this model means **predictable costs**, fewer headaches, and full control over budgets. For employees, it means **choice, flexibility,**

**and ownership** of their healthcare decisions. Everyone wins.

It’s the way modern benefits should work—simple, customizable, and fair.

### Why now?

As healthcare costs rise and talent competition grows, offering outdated benefits just doesn’t cut it. Employees are looking for flexibility, and businesses need efficiency. ICHRAs deliver both.

With Pro-Tier, you can implement this modern model in under an hour. It’s the future of employee healthcare—available right now.

You can also find more details about our solution on our [website](http://www.Pro-Tier.com) [www.Pro-Tier.com](http://www.Pro-Tier.com).

We built Pro-Tier to provide simple and flexible employee benefits (healthcare, vision, dental insurance, etc.) to restaurant owners across the country. By offering benefits, owners have significantly improved their employee recruiting and retention metrics.

Our solution is free (insurance companies pay us a broker fee), and owners can determine which roles receive those subsidies and can differentiate those subsidies for each function. **TR**

**About Sven Jensen:** Sven grew up in South Africa before attending Cornell University to study Actuarial Science. After graduating Magna Cum Laude he went on to work on Wall Street (Merrill Lynch, Technology Investment Banking and Allen & Company investing in Merger Arbitrage). Sven then spent two decades investing and running a handful of successful startup companies. He created Pro-Tier to address the challenges he faced deploying employee benefits in his role as CFO and launched the company in 2023. You can reach Sven Jensen, Founder / CEO of Pro-Tier at (415) 568-0527 or email [Sven@Pro-Tier.com](mailto:Sven@Pro-Tier.com). Visit the company website at [www.Pro-Tier.com](http://www.Pro-Tier.com).

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# Charcoal Group to open five new restaurants across Ontario

Hospitality leader investing up to \$30 million in growth as industry faces increasing pressure to cut corners

Ontario, Canada – At a time when many restaurant operators are pulling back and hospitality industry analysts warn that thousands of establishments could close amid ongoing economic uncertainty, Charcoal Group of Restaurants is moving in the opposite direction – doubling down on what it calls ‘true hospitality’ as the foundation for long-term success.

The Ontario-based, corporately owned hospitality company is investing \$25-30 million over the next 18 months to open five new restaurants across the province, marking a significant expansion of its footprint.

“We’re doing well and we’re very optimistic about the industry, and our investment into expansion reflects that,” says Jody Palubiski, CEO of Charcoal Group of Restaurants. “We see continued opportunity for growth when it’s grounded in strong hospitality and consistent guest experience.”

As part of the expansion, Charcoal Group of Restaurants will introduce new Wildcraft Grill + Long Bar locations in Burlington and the Niagara Region. The Niagara location will open alongside a new Beertown restaurant. Beertown will also continue its growth trajectory with planned locations in Peterborough and Richmond Hill.



For Charcoal Group of Restaurants, the expansion of both brands is driven by both confidence in the market and a deliberate focus on long-term community building.

“We’re very selective and want to make sure we’re the right fit for each community, and that we can deliver a meaningful experience through quality, location and hospitality,” says Palubiski. “It’s about more than just opening restaurants. We want our restaurants to serve as community hubs.”

While much of the broader industry has shifted towards operational efficiencies such as reduced staffing models, increased automation and growing reliance on third-party delivery platforms like Uber Eats and DoorDash, Charcoal Group of Restaurants continues to prioritize in-person dining and hospitality-first service.

The company says its restaurants are designed to be more than food and beverage destinations – they are intended as community gathering

*We’re in the people business. Guests remember how they felt in your space, not just what was on the plate.”*

spaces. From family dinners and business lunches to weekend celebrations, each concept is built around shared experiences and connection.

“There are a lot of restaurant groups implementing short-term fixes,” says Palubiski. “But there’s no replacement for true hospitality. We’re in the people business. Guests remember how they felt in your space, not just what was on the plate.”

As the hospitality landscape continues to evolve, Charcoal Group of Restaurants’ expansion signals confidence not only in its brands, but in the enduring role restaurants play as community anchors – places where service, atmosphere and human connection remain at the centre of the experience and industry. Online: [Charcoalgroup.ca](http://Charcoalgroup.ca).

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The cylinder can be refilled with fresh liquid mix as your product is sold. This machine’s inverter adjusts the motor speed for a variable beating speed to better control the gelato consistency. Variable beating speeds allow the unit to produce special recipes like granita and frozen coffee cream.

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## Hiring the right people - and keeping them

New employees represent a short-term cost to the business before they begin generating net value for the business, according to the report. Hourly employees break even after an average of 31.8 days, while managers and salaried staff take an average of 72.2 days – often extending to 3 to 6 months for leadership roles.

*Restaurants using automated hiring tools report reducing hiring timelines from weeks to as few as 3 to 4 days.*

With roles taking 16 days to fill for hourly positions and 46 days for managers, restaurants often operate short staffed in the interim, which strains teams, slows service, and costs revenue. Faster hiring reduces this operational strain and revenue losses. And the first 30 to 90 days after hiring are critical, as structured onboarding, mentoring, clear development paths, and consistent manager engagement largely determine if a new hire stays.

## Technology is transforming hiring and workforce management

Technology is helping restaurant operators address hiring challenges by dramatically compressing time-to-hire and streamlining post-hire processes; these investments will underpin future workforce success.

Restaurants using automated hiring tools report reducing hiring timelines from weeks to as few as 3 to 4 days. Beyond recruitment, nearly half of restaurants now use scheduling software, and 40 percent provide digital

onboarding resources. However, only about 26 percent of operators currently use AI tools, creating significant opportunity for broader adoption across the industry. Notably, 94 percent of restaurant operators report that recent technology investments did not eliminate permanent jobs.

## Great managers are the foundation of restaurant performance

While strategic use of technology is critical, restaurant operators note that great managers are the backbone of restaurant success – ensuring their teams are equipped to serve guests and communities. When hiring, 87 percent of operators prioritize the ability to build team culture and morale, followed by enhancing the guest experience (84%) and financial acumen (75%).

Strong leadership drives consistency, retention, and guest satisfaction, while weak management can quickly erode performance – making an intentional investment in leadership development and a strong management pipeline critical to long-term staffing stability and business performance.

“With the labor market stabilizing, restaurant operators are focused on building strong, high-performing teams,” Korsmo said. “Leadership, engagement, and smart use of technology are delivering better outcomes for employees, guests, and the business.”

The report builds on the Association’s previous research on workforce technology and draws on restaurant operator surveys and interviews with restaurant leaders nationwide. It provides data-backed insights on staffing models, scheduling strategies, onboarding best practices, and the return on investment tied to developing frontline employees and managers. Download the Research Insights: Hiring and Staffing paper, supported by Workday, [here](#). **TR**

analytics software built by EthosLink LLC. It helps restaurants, cafes, boutique hotels, and guesthouses bring guest reviews into one dashboard, then highlights sentiment, recurring topics, and review patterns so operators can decide what to improve next.

**Hot Head Burritos** has brought its signature bold flavors to the Emerald Coast with the opening of its Hurlburt Field restaurant at 112 Lielmanis Ave. May 7th. The debut marks the brand’s sixth Florida store and its third on an Air Force base, joining existing spots at Tyndall and Eglin. Located at the headquarters of Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field is home to the 1st Special Operations Wing and plays a key role in supporting training and specialized airpower. This opening places Hot Head Burritos within a fast-paced environment, where quick, reliable dining options are part of the daily



routine. Founded in Ohio in 2007, Hot Head Burritos has grown to more than 85 restaurants nationwide.

◆◆◆◆  
**Craveworthy Brands** concept, **Sigri Indian BBQ**, one of the first franchise brands known for delivering authentic North Indian barbecue with open-flame cooking, has signed a new franchise agreement in Gainesville. The first Florida location will be locally owned and operated by Ravin and Heali Mehta, a husband-and-wife team originally from the Northeast with a strong background in fast casual franchising. After successfully operating a previous restaurant concept, the duo relocated to Gainesville with a shared focus on building fresh dining destinations in their new community. The new Sigri is expected to open in mid-2027. [Craveworthybrands.com](http://Craveworthybrands.com). **TR**

# Yelp from page 1

## The Bottom Line

To a restaurant owner, Yelp isn’t a “community forum.” It is a billion-dollar middleman that inserts itself between the kitchen and the customer, charging a toll for a bridge nobody asked to have built. Until the platform prioritizes verified dining data over “Elite” status and aggressive ad sales, the “I Hate Yelp” sentiment in the industry isn’t going anywhere.

But the challenge has grown far beyond a single site. While Yelp may have been the first to make life difficult for owners, it now has plenty of company. Today’s restaurateurs must navigate a minefield of platforms including Google,

TripAdvisor, Instagram, Facebook, Reddit, and Nextdoor — not to mention the constant friction of third-party delivery apps.

Modern restaurateurs no longer just manage a kitchen; they manage a sprawling digital ecosystem. Because feedback is fragmented across a dozen different “digital front doors,” a single bad experience can go viral or tank a rating on a platform the owner might not even be monitoring. In the modern era, maintaining a reputation requires as much effort as maintaining food quality. **TR**

*About Benson Fischer: Benson Fischer is Founder / CEO of ZivZo Marketing Group. Visit [ZivZo.com](http://ZivZo.com) or phone (833) 948-9663 x700.*

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# Appell Pie from page 2

Principal of ERA Group. “From there, we often help restaurants evaluate other operating expenses that quietly impact margins over time, including merchant processing, waste, linens, janitorial, IT, insurance, and related vendor categories. Each area is supported by specialists who focus on those categories every day. The goal is helping operators ensure their costs remain competitive so more dollars stay in the business” Smith added.

Both Strategic Supply Chain Partners and The ERA Group provide their services on a no up-front fee basis by sharing in the savings they generate.

Technology is also reshaping cost management. Modern POS systems highlight underperforming menu items, online ordering reduces reliance on third-party delivery fees, and automated marketing keeps customers engaged without adding staff workload. Even small changes, such as switching to energy-efficient lighting or upgrading to more efficient equipment, can deliver long-term savings.

Financially, many operators are choosing to lease equipment rather than buy it outright, preserving cash flow and allowing for easier upgrades. Others are reviewing merchant processing fees, insurance policies, and utility plans to eliminate unnecessary expenses.

*Finally, restaurants are enhancing the guest experience in ways that boost revenue without heavy discounting.*

Finally, restaurants are enhancing the guest experience in ways that boost revenue without heavy discounting. Value-driven menu bundles encourage higher check averages, while events, tastings, and small in-house promotions help bring in traffic and build community.

Together, these approaches create a more resilient, efficient operation—one that can navigate economic pressure while still delivering a strong, memorable dining experience.

Despite the economic pressure, restaurants that embrace these operational, financial, and technological strategies are finding new ways to stay resilient. By tightening systems and focusing on efficiency, they can protect their margins while continuing to deliver a strong guest experience. **TR**

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# Pilar Coffee Bar continues rapid expansion

Deerfield Bch—Pilar™ Coffee Bar, the South Florida-born chic boutique bistro that’s beloved for its upscale ambiance, signature iced treats and European-style quick-service fare, has announced that it will open 11 new locations by the end of 2027. Each store will be franchised and individually owned and operated, by local entrepreneurs, all of whom are dedicated to creating a space that transcends the traditional coffee shop and is instead designed around how people live, work and recharge.

Founded by franchise leader Steve Giordanella of ABC Franchise Group, Pilar Coffee Bar features a selection of lattes, iced coffee, cold brews, and more made from internationally sourced, mountain-grown beans. Customers also enjoy artisanal pastries and a menu of gourmet fare like sandwiches and salads available daily. The brand debuted its flagship store in South Florida less than 18 months ago.

Pilar Coffee Bar’s next location will open in Roslyn, New York this summer. Also expected to debut later this year are locations in Elwood, New York and

Aurora, Colorado as well as Coral Springs and Palm Beach Gardens in the brand’s native Florida. In 2027, the modern-day cafe will also expand to Huntington Village and Manhasset (NY), Delray Beach, Miami and Tampa, along with Denver. It’s also eyeing locations in Georgia and New England, with other additional territories being sold across the country.

“From morning coffee to lunch meetings and afternoon resets, Pilar Coffee Bar offers a new level of luxury that is designed to be a part of everyday life,” said Giordanella. “With the U.S. coffee market valued at \$97 billion, the demand is there and we offer a way to become a part of it with a brand that already has a strong market momentum and a proven concept.” **TR**

ready has a strong market momentum and a proven concept.” **TR**

**About Pilar™ Coffee Bar:** Pilar™ Coffee Bar is a boutique coffee shop, known for its elevated offerings and European influence. The fast-growing brand offers an upscale experience, centering on premium coffee, harvested in Brazil and Colombia. Its culinary offerings include a selection of made-to-order sandwiches and salads along with decadent pastries.

Photo Credit - Steven Martine Photography Inc.



# TR Today's Restaurant

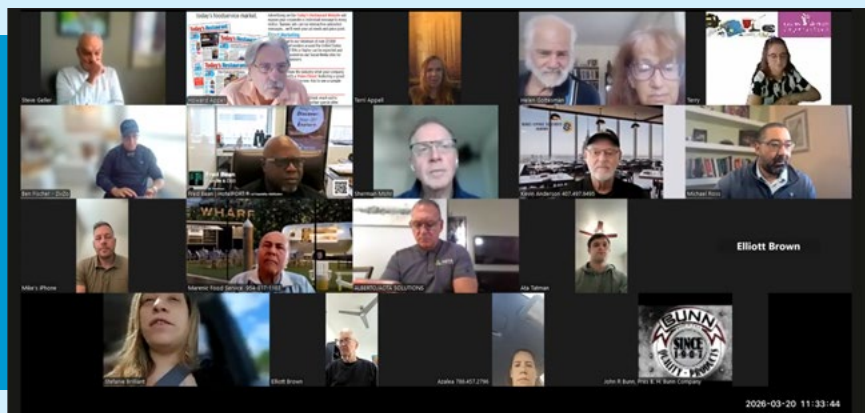
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# Today's Restaurant

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