

Baja Fresh Canyons Burger co-branded unit debuts

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The first dual-branded location combining Baja Fresh Mexican Grill with Canyons Burger Company opened earlier this month, and chain officials are hoping to tap the combined appeal of better burgers and fresh Mexican within the fast-casual segment.

Dubbed Baja Fresh Canyons Burger, the restaurant in Bozeman, Mont., is owned by franchisees Tim and Heidi Redelsperger, first-time restaurant operators who came from the auto services industry. The Redelspergers hold the rights to develop the concept in Montana. The couple initially planned to open two dual units.

Cypress, Calif.-based Fresh Enterprises, the parent to the 249-unit Baja Fresh, acquired Atlanta-based Canyons Burger in 2009 with plans to franchise the brand.

Canyons Burger operates two units in Atlanta, and the company is developing three franchise locations in Tampa, with the first scheduled to open in October. Locations also are in development in Washington and in Orange County in California.

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The Bozeman unit blends the “common DNA” and menus of the two brands to create a concept that offers Black Angus burgers and fries, as well as burritos, tacos and fajitas on one menu, officials said.

“We think there is a significant niche for Baja Fresh Canyons in Montana,” Tim Redelsperger said in a statement. “Eat Well. Play Hard. Live Fresh’ is the mantra of the restaurant, and we believe this fits well with the lifestyle here.”

Other companies have turned to co-branding as a way to reduce entry costs for franchisees and expand their options.

A Johnny Rockets franchisee in Chicago this month opened two co-branded locations with his Halsted Street Deli chain.

Kahala Corp. is co-branding its Cold Stone Creamery brand with both candy maker Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factor and Canada-based fast-casual chain Tim Hortons.

Atlanta-based Wendy’s/Arby’s Group Inc. is opening dual-branded Wendy’s/Arby’s locations overseas. And Austin, Texas-based Schlotzsky’s is co-branding with sister brand Cinnabon.

Nick Binnings, co-founder of Canyons Burger, said dual branding offers franchisees an opportunity to bring a much-in-demand better burger concept together under one roof with a fast-casual Mexican menu, which has also been a popular choice for cash-strapped consumers during the recession.

Charles Rink, brand president for Fresh Enterprises, said, “We will continue to evaluate the success of this restaurant and look forward to the growth of the new Baja Fresh Canyons Burger concept in new markets.”

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