OCTOBER 2026

Today's Restaurant

THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY AUTHORITY

VOLUME 31

30TH TR ANNIVERSARY

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Two shows celebrate milestone anniversaries in Orlando Oct. 25–27

One trip. Hundreds of ideas. Real solutions for running a better restaurant.

Restaurant owners and operators need ideas they can put to work, products that can improve their operations and connections that can help move their businesses forward. That's exactly what they'll find at the Florida Restaurant Show and Pizza Tomorrow Summit, taking place October 25–27 at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando.

This year also marks two major milestones: the 55th anniversary of the Florida Restaurant Show and the 5th anniversary of the Pizza Tomorrow Summit. To celebrate, Restaurant Events will be giving away a total of $5,000 to attendees during the event. Attendees can stop by registration to pick up a ticket for their chance to win.

Together, the co-located events will bring the restaurant, pizza and foodservice industries together for three days of product discovery, education, culinary competitions, demonstrations and networking - all with one registration.

With 400+ exhibitors, attendees will have an opportunity to see, taste, test and compare products and solutions covering virtually every aspect of restaurant operations. Exhibitors include Gordon Food Service, Back of House, PizzaMaster, Horizon Food Brokers, Keg Kraft Beverage Company, Galbani, Florida Dairy Farmers, Stirling Food Systems, Specialty Butter and OGGI Foods, along with hundreds of additional companies showcasing food and

See **TWO SHOWS** *page 6*

Famous Brands expands TCBY® and Mrs. Fields® presence across the Southeast

Expanded development agreement adds Georgia to existing North and South Carolina territory, with plans for 15 new locations

New York, NY -- Famous Brands International, the parent company of iconic dessert brands Mrs. Fields® and TCBY® (The Country's Best Yogurt), has announced continued growth across the Southeast through an expanded development agreement with longtime franchisee and area developer Samuel Batt of Batt Enterprises. The agreement adds Georgia to Batt's existing North Carolina and South Carolina territory,



with plans to develop 15 new locations across the three states.

Batt currently operates 15 TCBY and two Mrs. Fields locations and is experiencing his strongest year in the history of his TCBY ownership, with year-to-date sales up double digits compared with the same period last year. His continued investment reflects strong performance and sustained customer demand for both brands, while the expanded territory provides an opportunity to introduce TCBY and Mrs. Fields to more communities throughout the Southeast.

As an area developer, Batt is building on the infrastructure he has established in the Greater Charlotte market with further expansion across North Carolina, including the Research Triangle region of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill. His development strategy prioritizes suburban growth corridors, college-adjacent neighborhoods with experienced local operators to support long-term, sustainable growth.

The agreement represents a significant next phase of Batt's investments in the brands and builds on more than 16 years of experience as a TCBY franchisee. With Georgia now included in his territory, Batt plans

See **FAMOUS BRANDS** *page 12*



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Appell Pie

What is an I-9 and why is it important to you?

Howard Appell ◆ Today's Restaurant Publisher

The **Form I-9**, officially titled *Employment Eligibility Verification*, is a document required by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) that every employer must complete for each person they hire. Its purpose is to confirm that the employee is legally authorized to work in the United States. Restaurants, which often have high turnover and diverse staffing, are especially affected by I-9 compliance because mistakes or outdated procedures can lead to costly penalties and reputational damage. Understanding what the form is and how recent changes affect daily operations is essential for any foodservice business.

At its core, the I-9 process requires two things: the employee must present acceptable documents proving identity and work authorization, and the employer must examine those documents to ensure they appear genuine and relate to the person presenting them. Employers then record this information on the form and retain it for a set period—either three years after the date of hire or one year after employment ends, whichever is later. For restaurants, this means maintaining organized records even for short-term or seasonal staff. The form itself is not sent to the government but must be available for inspection by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Labor (DOL), or the Immigrant and Employee Rights Section (IER) of the Department of Justice.

The most recent updates to the I-9 form, implemented in 2023 and refined through 2024, introduced several changes that matter directly to restaurant operators. First, the form was redesigned to be more streamlined—fewer fields, clearer instructions, and a single page for both employee and employer sections. This simplification helps managers who handle onboarding during busy service hours. Second, the new version supports **remote document verification** under the DHS's "alternative procedure." Employers enrolled in E-Verify can now examine documents virtually through video calls, provided they retain copies and follow specific steps. For restaurants with multiple locations or franchise structures, this flexibility reduces the need for in-person verification when hiring staff across different cities.

Another important change is the emphasis on **anti-discrimination compliance**. The updated guidance reminds employers not to demand specific documents or reject valid ones based on appearance, nationality, or expiration dates. In a restaurant environment where many employees are immigrants or non-native English speakers, training managers to handle I-9 verification respectfully and consistently is crucial. The penalties for violations—whether intentional or accidental—can range from hundreds to thousands of dollars per form, and audits have become more frequent in the hospitality sector.

Restaurants should also pay attention to **recordkeeping and re-verification** procedures. When an employee's work authorization expires, the employer must complete Section 3 of the form to re-verify eligibility. Maintaining a calendar system or digital reminder for these dates prevents compliance gaps. Many operators now use electronic I-9 systems integrated with payroll or HR software, which automatically store forms and track deadlines. These tools can be particularly valuable for restaurants with high staff turnover or seasonal hiring cycles.

Finally, the new I-9 instructions encourage employers to use the most current version of the form and discard outdated ones. Using an obsolete form—even if completed correctly—can still result in penalties. Restaurant owners should ensure that every manager responsible for hiring has access to the latest version from the USCIS website and understands how to complete it properly. Regular internal audits, conducted quarterly or annually, help catch errors before an official inspection.

In summary, the I-9 is more than a bureaucratic form—it's a cornerstone of lawful employment in the restaurant industry. The latest updates simplify completion, allow remote verification, and reinforce fair hiring practices. For restaurant owners and managers, staying current with these changes protects the business from fines, supports a diverse workforce, and demonstrates professionalism in an industry built on trust and compliance.

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What's Going On

Important new products, corporate news and industry events



Primera Technology, Inc., the Plymouth, Minnesota-based specialty printing innovator behind Eddie®, The Edible Ink Printer, announced **Connie, The Cake Sheet Printer** — the world's first and only edible sheet printer built specifically to earn NSF certification for commercial kitchen use. Deliveries began in September 2026. Connie shares its core print head technology with Eddie, Primera's edible ink printer for cookies and treats — itself the first and only edible ink printer ever approved by NSF. Connie's print head is purpose-built for use with edible inks, with every material that contacts the ink carrying FDA approval for direct food contact. Print heads are manufactured in a cGMP-certified facility and filled in Primera's own FDA-inspected clean room.

We are closed in FL

The Surf Restaurant & Bar in Fernandina Beach has now been closed as of September 30th on Amelia Island. The Surf has been a local fixture on Amelia Island since 1957, making it one of the longest-running restaurant operations in the state. The closure marks the end of a nearly 70-year chapter in Florida's dining history.

MoonCricket Grille in Winter Garden has closed after over 20 years in business. The owner Bert Valdes has retired.

Chill-N Nitrogen Ice Cream closed after a 10-year run at 4356 N. State Road 7 in Turtle Crossing in Coral Springs.

Indigenous the restaurant that made responsibly sourced seafood in Sarasota has closed after 15 years.

Wolfgang Puck Bar & Grill permanently closed in Disney Springs on Sept 13th.

The Magic Cow at 10274 W. Sample Road is now closed also in Coral Springs. The owners, Alison and Andy McKnight who are originally from Scotland came to Florida in 2007. They have one other location that is still open at 4298 S. University Dr in Davie.



Al's Pizza closed after 23 years in business at 1620 Margaret Street in Jacksonville's historic Riverside neighborhood.

Half Wall Restaurant - After a decade, this Port Orange restaurant for sports fans, has permanently closed its doors. The Half Wall of Port Orange launched as the local micro-chain's largest outpost — a 7,000-square-foot building, constructed at the former Regal Cinema Port Orange 6 Theaters location — that opened in July 2016.

The Surf Restaurant, Bar and Beach Motel has closed after 70 years at 3199 S Fletcher Ave., in Fernandina Beach.

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Bacio® Cheese is increasing its efforts with operators across the country to elevate their pizza program from a side-menu staple into a true destination item. "Guests are becoming more selective when dining out, so operators need a standout pizza program that creates a distinct reason to return," said **Bobbi Laski, brand manager for Bacio.** "A premium pizza program can be the differentiator operators need. Backed by deep pizza expertise, the Bacio team delivers actionable insights that help bar-and-grill operators compete with pizzerias, while remaining true to their established brand and menu offerings." Bacio® is a premium Italian-style pizza cheese. As part of the Leprino Foods family of brands headquartered in Denver, Colo., Bacio offers a unique mozzarella-style pizza cheese made with a Kiss of Buffalo Milk®—a special touch that brings unmatched tradition and flavor. Baciocheese.com.

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ROB Hospitality Technologies Corp. has announced the introduction of Rob, a purpose-built digital companion designed to help independent restaurant owners think more clearly, act faster and feel less alone while running their businesses. ROB Founder/CEO Gilbert Yeremian – **"ROB, the AI-powered Restaurant Owner Buddy,** gives independent restaurant owners practical

See **WHAT'S GOING ON** *page 11*

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Keeping compliance top of mind during October-November-December

Alison Herman ◆ Of Cousel, Malkin Law P.A.

Once again, the holiday season is upon us — or OND (October–November–December) — one of the busiest and most profitable times of the year for restaurants and bars. More customers, more events, more promotions, more supplier and distributor activity — and a lot more pressure to move products.

It's also a time when it can be easy to cross a compliance line without necessarily realizing it. Suppliers and distributors want to support their brands and help you sell more products. That's good for everyone. But your state's tied-house and trade practice laws and regulations place limits on what they can provide and what restaurants and bars can accept.

A supplier or distributor salesperson offers to pay for something. Great, right?

Maybe. Maybe not.

Your state's tied-house and trade practice laws generally restrict suppliers and distributors from giving retailers money, gifts, services, rebates, or other things of value unless specifically permitted by law.

That doesn't mean suppliers and distributors can't help you promote their brands. They absolutely can. But there are rules — and more often than not the details matter.

Bar spends and credit-card swipes are a good example. If a supplier or distributor representative wants to buy drinks for consumers, conduct a bar spend, or swipe a credit card at your establishment, don't assume the transaction is permitted simply because someone is paying by credit card. Most states have very specific regulations governing these activities.

The same is true for consumer tastings, promotional events, sponsorships and other brand activities. These can be great ways to introduce consumers to products and help move brands — when they are structured correctly.

And, of course, OND means bigger crowds, holiday parties and often more alcohol consumption. Checking IDs, preventing service to anyone under 21, recognizing signs of intoxication and knowing when to stop service remain critical responsibilities. So, what should you and your team be thinking about as OND gets underway?

1. Not all supplier and distributor "support" is permitted.
2. Free doesn't necessarily mean compliant.
3. Watch the bar spends and credit-card swipes.
4. Consumer tastings, sponsorships and promotional events have rules.
5. Card your customers — and know when to stop serving.
6. Train your staff before the rush begins — and make the training real.
7. When in doubt, ask before you accept.

There is almost always a compliant way to accomplish the business goal. Sometimes it means changing the ask, structuring a promotion differently, or simply knowing what questions to ask before agreeing to something.

That's also why compliance training shouldn't just be about giving employees a policy or telling your team "No."

Alcohol beverage compliance is full of "What if?" situations. What happens when a sales representative proposes something your employee hasn't seen before? Is it permitted? Is there another way to accomplish the same goal?

Live, interactive training can make a real difference. It gives bartenders, servers and managers the opportunity to ask questions, raise the situations they actually encounter, and work through how to handle them before they happen in a busy account.

Just as importantly, your employees should understand how to work with supplier and distributor sales representatives to help promote the brands you carry, engage consumers and help move product — while staying within the rules.

Live training can take compliance a step further by giving your team an opportunity to apply those rules to the real-world situations they encounter every day.

Making sure your employees are prepared protects your license, your business, your employees and your customers.

Wishing everyone a successful — and compliant — OND.

Cheers.

About Alison Herman, Malkin Law P.A.: *Alison Herman is an attorney with more than 31 years of experience in the alcohol beverage industry. Herman spent 15 years with Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits (SGWS), the largest distributor of alcoholic beverages, as general counsel and then as senior counsel of regulatory and compliance, before joining the Malkin Law team. During this time, she gained extensive industry knowledge and experience in state and federal alcohol beverage law and successfully led numerous regulatory compliance matters and investigations. Herman began her legal career in 1988 as an Assistant State Attorney for the Broward County State Attorney's Office in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She is a graduate of the University of Miami School of Law.*

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Successful franchising, Mom & Pop restaurants and avoiding the pitfalls of tying up your employees

Dear Forum,

I have a question for you regarding the restaurant industry. I'm in New York City right now—I arrived this morning—and I'm dining at a very popular, casual restaurant on the Upper East Side. I was just speaking with the owner, who is seated nearby, and he mentioned plans to open the same restaurant in Florida. This concept survived COVID and remains extremely popular here in New York.

Do you know of anyone who might be interested in investing in a restaurant expansion to Florida that's already proven successful in New York? Or anyone who has available restaurant locations in Florida that could be suitable for this venture?

— JT

JT,

Since COVID and the recent election in New York City, many businesses have been looking to relocate due to higher taxes, increased regulations, and rising costs. States such as Florida, Texas, and Tennessee continue to attract entrepreneurs seeking stability and healthier business environments.

Contacting a local business broker would be a smart first step—they have market insight, local connections, and access to available properties. Another valuable source of information would be non-competing restaurants in your target area; they often know firsthand whether a location is likely to succeed.

Advertising in a trade publication — **Today's Restaurant**, of course — will expose your opportunity to thousands of industry professionals who stay closely tuned to market trends. Finally, joining a local or regional networking group such as **Today's Restaurant Networking** can help you gain insights, meet potential partners, and stay informed about laws and regulations that differ from those in New York.

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Dear Forum,

How do you react to a meal at a newly opened Mom and Pop restaurant where the people are lovely and the food is good but things are a little off and they clearly have not gotten their act together?

— Steve G

Steve,

That's a great question — and one every diner faces when rooting for the little guys.

When you walk into a new mom-and-pop spot and the people are genuinely kind, the food tastes good, but the operation feels a bit shaky — slow service, missing utensils, awkward pacing — the best reaction is **grace with gentle honesty**.

Here's how to handle it:

- **Enjoy what works.** Compliment the flavors, the warmth, the effort. Small teams thrive on encouragement.
- **Offer constructive feedback quietly.** If something's off — say, timing or presentation — mention it kindly to the owner or server. They'll often appreciate specifics more than vague praise.
- **Tip generously.** Early support helps them stabilize and train staff.
- **Return later.** Give them time to find their rhythm; your repeat visit shows faith in their growth.

It's a balance between being a guest and a community supporter. You're not just eating — you're helping a dream find its footing.

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Dear Forum,

I was online and saw a post from TMZ with the headline **Wendy's Manager Sacked for Tying Neurodivergent Employee to Kitchen Equipment.** First of all, what the heck is Neurodivergent and number two what was the manager thinking? It turns out it was a scene for TikTok using garbage bags to tie him up and no charges have been filed but company officials were not excited about it. LOL

— Jim W

Jim,

Key Takeaways

- Being neurodivergent means your brain processes information, learns, and acts differently from typical patterns.
- Neurodivergence reflects natural variations in human thinking and comes with both strengths and challenges.
- Learning more about how neurodivergent brains work can help you access support and find ways to work with your brain instead of against it.





Two shows hit Orlando in October *from page 2*

beverage products, equipment, technology and services.

For restaurant operators facing rising costs, workforce challenges and rapidly changing technology, the ability to meet suppliers face-to-face and compare solutions in one place can save valuable time while uncovering new opportunities to improve efficiency, profitability and the guest experience.

Education is a major part of this years' experience, with more than 40 hours of programming addressing the issues restaurant professionals are dealing with every day - from profitability, food costs and restaurant operations to marketing, AI, staffing, leadership and customer engagement.

The program will feature the popular *Restaurant Management 201 and 301* workshops, presented by Darren Denington, Founder/Operator - Service with Style and Alison Anne, Leader - Restaurant Revolution. These in-depth workshops will provide restaurant managers and operators with a deeper dive into management fundamentals and strategies for strengthening their businesses.

Just added to the program is *The Wizard Behind the Curtain workshop* presented by Michael Tipps, Founder of Maverick Theory. Designed specifically for owners and entrepreneurs, the workshop will take attendees behind the scenes of what it takes to build a great restaurant concept and turn an idea into a business that resonates with guests.

With so much happening simultaneously, owners should consider bringing members of their management teams. An executive chef can explore new ingredients and equipment while a general manager focuses on staffing and operations, a marketing professional attends sessions on AI and customer engagement, and an owner concentrates on profitability and growth. Teams can divide, learn and return to their restaurants with multiple ideas to implement. To make it easier and more affordable to bring the entire team, the events offer a Team Bundle Package for groups of six from the same organization, providing significant savings and added flexibility. One team member can register now and add additional team members closer to the show.

> *Celebrating its 5th Anniversary, the Pizza Tomorrow Summit will offer an extensive lineup of education, competitions, demonstrations and special events.*

Throughout all three days the Sunshine Plate Challenge Arena, will feature more than 30 professional chefs who will showcase their skills in four American Culinary Federation (ACF)-sanctioned competitions. The arena is sponsored by Unox, with product sponsors including Bar Harbor Seafood, Expedition Provisions, Yukan Foods and Keg Kraft Beverage

The action begins Sunday, October 25, with Student and Professional Pastry Sculpture Competitions and a Professional Pork Challenge, followed by the Professional Seafood Challenge, sponsored by Bar Harbor Seafood on Monday, October 26, and the Professional Beef Challenge on Tuesday, October 27.

Evaluating the competitors will be an accomplished panel of culinary professionals led by Reimund Pitz, CEC, CCE, AAC, HOF, Conseiller Culinaire et des Professionnels des Etats-Unis of La Confrérie de la Chaîne des Rôtisseurs. He will be joined by Tim Recher, WCMC, CEC, AAC, MWMCS, HofF, Director of Culinary Operations at The Club at Mediterra in Naples, Florida, and Walter Zuromski, CEC, CCE, owner and Chief Culinary Officer of Chef Services Group, Inc. in Rotonda West, Florida.

The Sunshine Plate Challenge Arena will also feature The Hospitality School Showdown on Sunday, October 25, bringing some friendly competition - and plenty of school pride - to Orlando. Culinary faculty from four of Florida's leading hospitality management programs will go head-to-head representing the Florida State University Dedman College of Hospitality, Florida International University Chaplin School of Hospitality & Tourism Management, University of Central Florida Rosen College of Hospitality Management and Florida Gulf Coast University School of Resort & Hospitality Management. Alumni, faculty, industry colleagues and fans are encouraged to come out, cheer on their school and see which team comes out on top.

Celebrating its 5th Anniversary, the Pizza Tomorrow Summit will offer an extensive lineup of education, competitions, demonstrations and special events. A highlight will be a live taping of the So You Want to Run a Restaurant Podcast featuring Rick Rosenfield, CEO of California Pizza Kitchen who will discuss and give out copies of his new book The California Pizza Kitchen Story. This is being sponsored by Back of House and held at the Sunshine Plate Arena on Monday, October 26 at 1:30 pm.

The US Pizza Team and Galbani Professionale US will be hosting the '26 Galbani Professionale Pizza Cup here at the Pizza Tomorrow Summit. Talented pizzaioli and pizza acrobats from across the country will go head-to-head, in culinary and acrobatic competitions, with the grand-prize winners earning a trip to compete at the World Pizza Championships in Parma, Italy

The Florida Restaurant Show and Pizza Tomorrow Summit take place October 25–27, 2026, at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando. Register by October 17 to take advantage of early registration discounts. And with $5,000 being given away in celebration of 55 years of the Florida Restaurant Show and five years of the Pizza Tomorrow Summit, there's even more reason to be in Orlando this October.





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Restaurants coming to Orlando in 2027

By 2027, Orlando will see major dining expansions at both Walt Disney World and Orlando International Airport (MCO), with new restaurants in parks, resorts, and the airport.

Walt Disney World — New restaurants confirmed

Disney has officially announced new dining locations tied to 2027 park and resort expansions:

Moonglade – Table service at Disney's Lakeshore Lodge (opens July 1, 2027). Seasonal dishes with locally sourced ingredients, floor-to-ceiling nature views.

Bay Lake Provisions – Quick service marketplace at Lakeshore Lodge. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner with an open kitchen and Disney-themed décor.

Harryhausen's – Table service in Monstropolis at Disney's Hollywood Studios. Sushi and non-sushi menu, inspired by Monsters, Inc.; includes a sushi chef Audio-Animatronic.

Archie's Scare Pig Pizza – Quick service in Monstropolis. Named after Fear Tech's mascot Archie; themed to the new land.

La Hacienda Pueblo Esperanza – Quick service in Disney's Animal Kingdom's new Pueblo Esperanza land. (All courtesy of the Disney Food Blog)

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The Florida Restaurant Show is once again co-locating with **The Pizza Tomorrow Summit!** The Show will be held at the Orange County Convention Center from Oct 25-27. Attend two shows with just one badge - and take advantage of a new pool of product-sourcing options for your business.

Explore hundreds of exhibitors with a wide range of products, a robust conference program plus entertaining and informative pizza competitions and demonstrations. Get excited about the new companies, products and initiatives that will help







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What are the most haun

Some of the hotels that visitors have called home through the years have had their share of unearthly and rather unnerving encounters, with not a single little wizard in sight. The city's top three haunted hotels offer a glimpse into Orlando's shadowy spooks.

The Angebilt Hotel

Joseph F. Ange's vision of a luxurious downtown Orlando hotel was very much in keeping with the time. Construction began in 1921, and the hotel opened its glittering doors in March 1923. The roaring 20s changed the face of the nation, particularly where commercial expansion, opulence, and finance were swirled together.

Employees have spoken of terrifying encounters while on bathroom breaks at the downtown icon. A violent shaking of the bathroom stall had one woman fear for her wellbeing. She was so shaken she crawled out from under the mysteriously locked stall door and made a panicked dash for the exit. As the terrified woman made her escape, she could hear a cacophonous banging behind her.

The San Juan Hotel

When it opened in 1885, San Juan was the tallest building in the city, three stories—and Orlando's first permanent hotel. Scandal enveloped the San Juan Hotel in 1938 with the death by poisoning of a 19-year-old woman. By the time the mystery was unraveled, the tale would shock the city and make headlines across the country. A former











RESTAURANT CITY
ANDO

nted hotels in Orlando?



policeman with secret ambitions of building a criminal network had inadvertently killed the girl when cyanide-laced whisky, intended to kill his criminal cohort, was passed on first to a stranger in a bar and finally to young Dolores Myerly. It is said that the ghost of Dolores Myerly still occupies Room 208, where she met her awful fate. Myely isn't the only death to stain the San Juan. Like the Angebilt nearby, the San Juan has an old underground tunnel to the Beacham Theatre.

The Super 8 Hotel International Drive

Although there are many Super 8 Hotels, the relatively unremarkable location on International Drive may be the most haunted hotel in Orlando, or at least the most haunted room. Erected in 1986, numerous guests and cleaning staff have reported making their beds in the morning only to almost immediately find a clear and visible indentation of someone lying on top of the bed. The room often turns ice cold, regardless of searing outside temperatures, and the AC is turned off. Many have speculated as to why this particular room would hold such special spectral significance, with paranormal investigators even exploring the room and recording odd sounds and readings. No single event or death has been attributed to this suspected haunting, but the continued spectral activity in Room 206 has made believers of many skeptics. TR







propel our evolving industry into the future. Visit floridarestaurantshow.com or see Our Front Page. Register for Free using code TRN

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Category 10 is a new live music, dining and entertainment venue from country star Luke Combs and Opry Entertainment Group, will be opening in Universal CityWalk late 2027. It won't replace any existing venues there. This will be the third Category 10 location. The Orlando venue will join the flagship location in Nashville which opened in 2024 and the recently announced Las Vegas location slated to open later in 2026.

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Bruder Restaurant & Brewery has opened at 1280 Oviedo Mall Blvd. in Oviedo. It is their 1st U.S. location. The establishment offers Colombian hospitality and German brewing traditions together. Bruder was founded by brothers Héctor and Danny Martínez, engineers who set out to honor German brewing tradition with a bold, unique twist, back in 2009. What started as a small-batch passion project grew into an internationally awarded craft brewery, earning 18+ international accolades. Several of their signature creations — including their acclaimed Maracuyá (passion fruit) IPA — stand as award-winning beers, having proudly taken home multiple Gold Medals at the World Beer Awards. The menu pairs hearty pub fare with the signature brews. Visit USBrews.com.

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Today's Restaurant invites you to submit information for the What's Going On column at any time. Please e-mail your company, product or event information to terri@trnusa.com and try to keep the word count at 50-75 words or so. Get free publicity for your company, product or service! TR

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What's Going On *from page 3*

operational guidance, business continuity and owner-to-owner connection in one platform." Rob combines artificial intelligence with real-world restaurant operating experience to support owners across daily operations, leadership, growth, problem-solving and professional connection. Rather than asking owners to adapt a general-purpose chatbot to the restaurant business, Rob is being developed around the language, pressure and decisions that define hospitality ownership. The company is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. restaurantownerbuddy.com.

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The Spice & Tea Exchange is continuing their national growth with five new franchise agreements across FL, NC, and Louisiana. The latest agreements will bring the brand to Vero Beach, FL; Southern Pines, NC; New Bern, NC; Hillsborough, NC; and St. Francisville, LA.

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Hotel Happenings:

The Ballad Hotel, a 158-room, 10-story hotel that will have a rooftop bar, fine-dining restaurant, and over 20,000 square feet of retail in the heart of Clearwater Beach, is slated to open late 2027.

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PEBB Enterprises and Falcone Group are beginning construction on The Compass by Margaritaville Beachwalk Resort in St. Johns County. Permits filed in late August cover the $10.5 million Compass by Margaritaville Hotel on Beachwalk Shore Drive. The project will feature a four-story hotel with 111 guest rooms and 68 cottages, and early construction is already underway. Completion is expected in early 2028. Falcone Group is led by Chief Operating Officer Alfonso Costa Jr.

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Magnolia Bakery will open this month in Ohio, making its debut. It was founded in New York City's West Village in 1996. It will open in the Legacy Village shopping center in Lyndhurst. The Magnolia Bakery franchise is owned by Jessica Leonard. **They will also open a location in Hylan Commons, Staten Island, NY this year and Mount Laurel NJ.**

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Biscuit Belly has announced the acquisition of 35 locations from Maple Street Biscuit Company, a subsidiary of Cracker Barrel. This strategic purchase will accelerate the company's expansion across the Southeast and will bring Biscuit Belly to over 60 units by the end of 2028. Chad and Lauren Coulter are the founders of Biscuit Belly. The units are now Franchised.



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D-Spot Dessert Café, Canada's leading dessert café brand, is embarking on its international expansion plans with its first location in the US. The new café is in Dallas at 3432 E Hebron Pkwy. The Dallas location is operated by franchise partners Abdul R. Khan and Faizan Mirza, who bring experience in hospitality, retail and operations. "This opening marks a significant step in D-Spot's growth strategy as we expand into the U.S. market," says Kaan Sayiner, CEO and President, D-Spot Dessert Café. "With a strong Canadian footprint, we're excited to bring our dessert experience to new communities as part of our broader U.S. expansion." Visit the company's website online at Dspotdessert.com.

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Aroma Joe's Coffee, one of the nation's fastest-growing handcrafted beverage franchises, based in Maine, is continuing their expansion in the coming years. Dave Tucci is the Chief Franchise and Development Officer. Following the opening of its Cape Coral location earlier this year, Aroma Joe's expanded further into Southwest Florida with the opening of new locations in Port Charlotte and Ft. Myers. More are in the pipeline. Visit aromajoes.com.

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Crunchtime, a market leader in restaurant operations management software, announced the launch of the industry's first connected operations management suite, centralizing common workflows on the kitchen display system (KDS) and delivering the most comprehensive cross-system insights in one place. The launch delivers on the promise of cross-product connections stemming from the company's 2025 merger with QSR Automations. "By bringing all of this data together in a single view along with AI-driven analysis, we're changing the landscape of modern restaurant decision-making," said John Raguin, CEO of Crunchtime. "With a single source of truth, GMs and above-store leaders can make more proactive decisions and uncover new insights, driving even greater efficiency, consistency, and profitability." Visit Crunchtime.com.

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ARK MFG has announced the acquisition of Therma-Tek Commercial Cooking Solutions, a nationally respected manufacturer of professional

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

Counter Top Batch Freezer





- Fully automatic single cylinder table top machine, designed for the production and sale of fresh gelato and ice cream.
- The continuous churning process is done in front of customers, adding fresh liquid mix as the product is sold.
- A sophisticated, but easy to use, electronic controller guaranties the best texture and quality all the time.
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- *The machine can be placed side by side with others in a battery*
- *WiFi for remote management*
- *No need for water connection*
- *Cleaning water is drained into a bucket using a hose and straight or right angle tap*
- *Air cooled*
- *Automatic night function*
- *Made of high quality food grade stainless steel*

Create the highest quality frozen desserts (ice cream, gelato, sorbet, custard, etc.) with this 2.75 qt. air cooled countertop batch freezer. This unit can make a batch of product but also features a continuous churning design to freeze mixes of ice cream, gelato, sorbet, custard, and more, combining cooling and stirring to reach the perfect serving consistency of any frozen dessert. Additionally, this batch freezer maintains the product structure for an indefinite time within the batch freezer cylinder. It's the perfect addition to ice cream shops, restaurants, bars, and coffee shops.

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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Pat LaFrieda Meat Purveyors expands across the Southeast with Inland Foods

Partnership brings together a century of New York craft butchery with nearly five decades of culinary relationships

Atlanta, GA - Inland Foods (Inland) and Pat LaFrieda Meat Purveyors today announced a strategic partnership to bring a new collection of premium PLMP beef to restaurants, independent markets, butcher shops, and specialty food retailers across the Southeast.

The partnership marks PLMP's first full-scale distribution rollout in the region and brings together two companies with complementary strengths: PLMP's generations of butcher expertise and Inland's longstanding relationships, infrastructure, and knowledge of the Southeast market.

Founded in Atlanta in 1977 as a seafood company, Inland built its reputation sourcing exceptional seafood and serving chefs and food businesses throughout the Southeast. Over nearly five decades, the company has evolved into Inland Foods, expanding beyond seafood into premium meats and artisan provisions while maintaining the product expertise, quality standards, and carefully selected supplier relationships that have defined the business from the beginning. Following a strategic realignment of its distribution footprint earlier this year, Inland is now concentrating its resources in the Southeast, where its relationships, infrastructure and expertise provide the strongest foundation for long-term growth.

"We know this market, and we spend a lot of time listening to what chefs, operators and independent retailers need," said Chris Rosenberger, President of Inland Foods. "We also pay attention to where there are gaps, and which producers are doing something exceptional. Our strength is connecting those dots for our customers. Pat LaFrieda & his company bring a level of expertise, quality, and reputation that we believe chefs and culinary professionals across the Southeast should have access to, and this partnership allows us to bring that directly to them."

The LaFrieda family has been perfecting the butcher's craft since 1922. Today, the third-generation company operates two USDA-inspected facilities totaling more than 150,000 square feet and supplies approximately 2,000 restaurants nationwide, while maintaining the product standards and butcher-driven approach on which the family built its reputation.

"We've spent more than a century building our reputation one cut, one restaurant and one relationship at a time," said Patrick Lafrieda, fourth-generation butcher and CEO of Pat LaFrieda Meat Purveyors. "As we looked at expanding our presence in the Southeast, we wanted a partner that had built its business the same way. Inland has spent nearly 50 years serving this market and building lasting relationships with chefs, operators, and retailers throughout the region. They understand their customers, they understand the market, and they share our commitment to quality and consistency. That made this partnership a natural fit."

Together, the two companies developed an inaugural assortment for the Southeast market, spanning portion-controlled filets, ribeyes, New York strips, porterhouses and specialty bone-in cuts, along with dry-aged selections and the Original LaFrieda Burger. The 100% Black Angus program includes carefully selected Upper Choice and USDA Prime offerings, as well as a Prime 850 Club Porterhouse. The collection was also intentionally packed in smaller case sizes, providing greater flexibility for restaurant kitchens, independent markets, and butcher shops to manage storage, inventory, and food costs while maintaining access to premium cuts.

"Pat LaFrieda has built a reputation among chefs for a reason," said Todd Ginsberg, Chef/Partner, Rye Restaurants. "There's a level of quality and craftsmanship behind the product that you can see in the cuts and, ultimately, taste on the plate. Having access to that kind of program here in the Southeast — through a distributor we already know and trust — is something I think a lot of chefs are going to be excited about."

See **PARTNERSHIP** *page 14*







Restaurant video marketing: The essential guide to ramping up sales

Benson Fischer ◆ CEO of ZivZo Marketing Group

Video is the single most powerful lever in restaurant marketing, accounting for over 80% of all online traffic. For operators, it is no longer just a brand-awareness exercise—it is the primary driver for filling tables, protecting margins, and generating measurable covers. Diners retain roughly 90% of information conveyed through video compared to only 20% from text.

Dining is an inherently multi-sensory pursuit. The crackle of a wood-fired oven, the clatter of cocktail tins, and the steam rising from braised short ribs trigger visceral appetite cues. While static photography captures only a single frozen frame, dynamic video showcases the craveability, energy, and operational craft of an entire concept.

The Neurobiology of the Visual Appetite

Food decisions are governed by rapid emotional impulses rather than pure logic. High-definition, short-form video leverages sensory marketing to eliminate decision fatigue and manufacture immediate cravings:

◆ **Kinetic Freshness:** Motion proves quality. Cheese scraped over roasted potatoes, a yolk breaking across fresh pasta, or broth poured tableside demonstrates viscosity, temperature, and texture in ways still photography cannot simulate.

◆ **Acoustic Satiety (ASMR):** Crisp audio—the crunch of fried chicken, the sizzle of a steak hitting cast iron, or the pop of a champagne cork—directly stimulates salivary responses via the parasympathetic nervous system.

◆ **Radical Authenticity:** Modern diners distrust overly staged, hyper-edited studio shots. Unfiltered video provides honest proof of what the dish actually looks like when it hits the table.

Discovery Algorithms and Local Search Dominance

Guest discovery has shifted toward short-form visual feeds and intelligent, location-aware search engines.

Platforms like Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts operate on content graphs rather than static follower counts. Algorithms evaluate watch time and engagement to distribute relevant content directly to users within a 5- to 15-mile radius of your doors, reaching high-intent locals who may not follow your account.

Simultaneously, visual search has replaced traditional queries. Diners search for phrases like "best natural wine bar" or "late-night noodles" directly inside social apps. Because these platforms index audio, captions, and on-screen text, optimized video surfaces right when dining decisions are made.

This behavior extends to search engines. Google indexes short-form video on Google Business Profiles and local map packs. Active video assets increase user dwell time, sending positive ranking signals that lift local visibility above competitors relying exclusively on static images.

The Core Video Content Framework

A sustainable content strategy relies on four repeatable pillars that require zero disruption to dinner service:

◆ **The Signature Hero Item:** Focus clips on a single menu standout. Open with a two-second visual hook of the finished dish, cut to a quick preparation shot, and end with the first bite.

◆ **Culinary Process and Craft:** Show the prep work that justifies menu pricing. Filming morning bread lamination, whole-animal butchery, or house-made pasta extrusion highlights technique and value.

◆ **Atmosphere and Hospitality:** Demystify the space for first-time guests. A quick panning shot of a bustling 8:00 PM dining room communicates lighting, dress code, and seating energy. Featuring floor managers and line cooks establishes a warm human connection.

◆ **Guest Reposts and Social Proof:** Curate authentic guest-recorded clips. Sharing real customer reactions delivers credible social proof that converts hesitant viewers far faster than self-promotional posts.

Operational In-House Production Playbook

High-converting food content does not require an expensive film crew. Overly polished productions often resemble generic TV ads that users instinctively skip. Prioritize mobile agility:

◆ **Capture Settings:** Shoot on a modern smartphone in 4K at 60 frames per second. This frame rate allows for fluid standard playback and enables crisp 50% slow-motion stabilization for pours, pulls, and sears.

◆ **Lighting and Sound:** Avoid harsh overhead spotlights. Use natural window light during prep or position a small, warm-toned portable LED panel at a 45-degree angle behind the plate to backlight steam. Clip an inexpensive wireless microphone near cutting boards or bar stations to capture crisp ambient audio.

◆ **Batch Production:** Keep filming frictionless by capturing 15 to 20 short B-roll clips during non-service morning prep once a week. Film two or three finished plates before the dining room opens, saving assets into organized folders to edit into three to four weekly posts.

Paid Funnels and Direct Reservation ROI

Organic reach builds local awareness, but a structured paid funnel turns views into confirmed covers across reservation platforms like OpenTable, Resy and SevenRooms:

◆ **Top of Funnel:** Run high-energy video ads featuring signature dishes and dining room energy targeted within a tight radius of your zip code.

◆ **Middle of Funnel:** Retarget users who watched at least 50% of top-funnel videos with clips highlighting seasonal specials, private event spaces, or chef profiles.

◆ **Bottom of Funnel:** Deploy direct-response booking ads with clear calls to action (e.g., "Reserve for Friday Date Night") linked directly to booking links with tracking parameters to measure exact cost-per-cover.

Tight margins leave little room for speculative marketing. Video compresses the distance between digital discovery and a seated guest, transforming local scrollers into repeat reservations. TR

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Famous Brands *from page 1*

to carry the momentum established in the Carolinas into new markets while applying his experience operating and developing both brands. As he continues this growth, Batt is working closely with Famous Brands to identify and support franchisees who share his commitment to TCBY and Mrs. Fields and are equally as dedicated to building strong, lasting operations.

"I'm proud to continue reinvesting in TCBY and Mrs. Fields," said Samuel Batt, Franchise Owner. "These are iconic brands that generations of customers have known and loved for decades, and we continue to see that connection translate into strong performance today. Expanding across the Southeast gives us the opportunity to bring high-quality frozen yogurt and freshly baked treats to more communities throughout the region. I look forward to growing both brands and introducing them to even more families."

A franchisee since 2010, Batt has played a pivotal role in the evolution of TCBY, including piloting the brand's first self-serve concept for the brand in Charlotte, an initiative that helped inform its broader rollout. In addition to operating his own locations, Batt supports other franchisees throughout the region by providing operational guidance and development support. He also takes pride in giving back to the communities his stores serve, having donated six figures over the years to local schools, sports organizations, and nonprofits.

TCBY offers a broad selection of frozen yogurt flavors and treats designed to appeal to a range of tastes and dietary preferences. Its menu includes more than 50 soft-serve and 16 hand-scooped yogurt flavors, including low-fat, fat-free, dairy-free, gluten-free, vegan and no sugar added options. Guests can customize their orders with more than 35 toppings, including candy, fresh fruit, nuts and sauces. The menu at select locations also includes milkshakes, parfaits, sundaes, cakes, pies, chillers, sorbet fizz, and other frozen treats.

For more than four decades, Mrs. Fields has delighted customers with its signature cookies, cookie cakes, brownies, and gift offerings. As the brand continues to evolve, it remains a destination for freshly baked treats that combine nostalgia with everyday indulgences for customers across generations.

With franchise opportunities available in key U.S. markets—including Raleigh-Durham, NC; Charleston, SC; and Atlanta, GA—TCBY and Mrs. Fields are actively seeking experienced multi-unit operators. TR

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What's Going On

from pg.10

commercial cooking equipment. This strategic move expands ARK MFG's American-made manufacturing portfolio into the hot side of commercial kitchen solutions. Therma-Tek is recognized as a brand of choice among professional chefs and restaurateurs worldwide, producing high-quality, durable cooking equipment engineered for performance and reliability. All products are designed and manufactured in the United States. "This acquisition continues us down our path of investing in American-made manufacturing and expanding the range of products we can offer our customers," said Gian Carlo Alonso, Founder and CEO of ARK MFG. "This is one of the most exciting ventures we've taken on yet. I've always wanted to build a world-class cooking line, and now we're proudly adding the hot side alongside our refrigeration offerings."

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Today's Restaurant invites you to submit your information for the What's Going On column. E-mail your company, product, service or event info to terri@trnusa.com. Get free publicity for your company, product or service! TR

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Partnership

from page 11

The curated collection from Pat LaFrieda Meat Purveyors is now available through Inland Foods. TR

About Inland Foods: *Founded in Atlanta in 1977, Inland Foods is a specialty food distributor with nearly five decades of experience serving the Southeast's food community. Built on a foundation of premium seafood, the company has expanded its portfolio to include premium meats, artisan provisions, and specialty foods sourced from respected producers across the region and around the world. Inland serves restaurants, retailers, and other food businesses throughout the Southeast, combining deep regional relationships and market knowledge with a focus on quality, service, innovation, and carefully curated products. The company remains headquartered in Atlanta, with operations serving key markets across the Southeast.*

About Pat La Frieda Meat Purveyors: *Pat LaFrieda Meat Purveyors is a third-generation, family-owned butcher and meat purveyor with a history dating to 1922. Built on more than a century of butcher craftsmanship, the company has grown from its New York roots to supply approximately 2,000 restaurants nationwide from two USDA-inspected facilities in North Bergen, New Jersey. PLMP is known for its premium beef programs, custom cutting capabilities, dry-aging expertise, and signature burger blends, as well as a longstanding commitment to quality, consistency, and close relationships with chefs and restaurant operators.*



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