

Bethpage sisters opening a Saladworks at The Source

Two women ready to open Saladworks franchise in The Source food court

BY DANNY TEIGMAN

bizdesk@newsday.com

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Mary Jane Schneider and Ellen Zettler prepare for the opening of Saladworks, in The Source mall. (Newsday Photo / Bruce Gilbert / June 17, 2008)

With an economy hobbled by mortgage-related and other problems, many people are concerned about keeping jobs rather than starting new businesses.

Despite the tough financial environment, two Bethpage sisters are putting some green toward their greens and are opening a new salad bar restaurant next Tuesday in the food court at The Mall at the Source in Westbury.

Mary Jane Schneider, 46, and Ellen Zettler, 54, said they are hopeful that their first foray into the

restaurant field will succeed and their location will attract an upscale crowd.

"It's going to happen, it's going to happen," said an enthusiastic Schneider as she stood in her new restaurant in front of a roughly 10-foot stack of 120 unopened cardboard boxes filled with kitchen supplies. It is scheduled to open June 24.

The pair will operate a franchise for Saladworks, a company based in Conshohocken, Pa., near Philadelphia. The restaurant will be the franchise's first in New York. With only a five-week restaurant management and food safety training course under their belts, Schneider and Zettler said they are up to the challenge, having laid out approximately \$350,000 in start-up costs, some of it borrowed.

Even during difficult economic times, many try to build businesses on Long Island. But entrepreneurs like Schneider and Zettler face daunting odds.

Mario Saccente, executive vice president of the New York State Restaurant Association's Long Island chapter, cautioned that with restaurant profits down 15 to 25 percent islandwide from a year ago, now may not be the best time to open any kind of restaurant, let alone one at The Source.



"The Source is probably the most expensive mall on Long Island," Saccente said, referring to overhead costs.

Saccente said unlike a steak house, salad restaurants are not unique and money-conscious consumers could just as easily prepare a salad lunch at home. Saladworks customers order their ingredients at the counter, where their take-away salads are prepared to order.

But he added that franchise restaurants are in a better position to open new locations compared to smaller mom and pop stores, because they have a larger pool of money to invest and risk is spread across numerous locations.

Schneider and Zettler said they consider the restaurant's location an advantage. A food court

setting guarantees foot traffic and the mall's seating area accommodates approximately 500 patrons. Schneider and Zettler believe their yearlong search for the proper franchise will pay off.

"After we get our salad legs, we're hoping to be looking for another store," Schneider said. "We're viewing this as training wheels."

And if Maryann Wainstock of Manhattan -- a shopper at The Source yesterday who was finishing her make-your-own mixed green salad lunch in the food court -- is any indication of future customers, then the sisters are in good shape.

"I'm happy it's coming. It's more options," Wainstock said.

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