

NESS

The Gloucester County business scene

INSIDE TODAY'S SECTION:

- Economy, B-2
- Dear Abby, B-6
- Dr. Gott, B-8

Paradise Tossed

Mall management didn't think a salad store would pay the rent — boy, were they wrong!

By Senitra Horbrook

shorbrook@sjnewsco.com

The first time John Scardapane presented his concept of a quick-casual all-salad eatery to the management of the Cherry Hill Mall, he was turned down. "They never saw anything like that," said Scardapane, founder and chief executive officer of Saladworks. "They didn't feel it would pay the rent that they needed to charge."

After keeping at it for several months Scardapane was given the official OK to open his eatery, but only if he dedicated half the business to sandwiches. Two months later, the sandwiches were removed from the menu.

"The first year and a half we were the highest grossing concept in the mall food court," he said.

That was in 1986. From that one location in the Cherry Hill Mall, Saladworks has grown to 87 locations and now has a rapid-growth expansion plan to open 300 new stores nationwide in the next four years.

In 1989, Scardapane opened up the concept to franchisees.

"I worked up to about a dozen locations pretty quickly. It was very difficult for me as an owner/operator to run those 12 stores," he said. "We want a great experience for customers and at the time I wasn't delivering that."

Over the years, franchisees wanted second and third locations. Scardapane looked at trying to find a partner and also looked into selling the company, but he couldn't find anyone right for the business. So, in 2000, he decided to bring in training and infrastructure at the corporate office in Conshohocken, Pa. That has enabled the company to properly plan for nationwide growth.

"We had to do that first," he said. "So many chains sell franchises and then try to build infrastructure."

Scardapane attributes the company's success to the corporate culture and values.

"We have strict values we adhere to — that translates to the franchisees and people that are serving the customers," he said. "When we interview for new prospects for franchisees, new help for the home office or salad makers, we're always looking at if the core values exist in who we're

(See **TOSSED**, Page B-4)



Staff photos by Tim Hawk

Above, franchise operator Frank Salera fills the salad case at the Saladworks in Deptford Township. Below, assistant manager Roshe Gramham makes a salad.



JOHN SCARDAPANE
CEO of Saladworks

Tossed: SaladWorks franchises are doing great

(Continued from Page B-1)

hiring. That helps guide us in good times and bad."

Times are good right now for Saladworks and its franchisees. The company took in \$60 million in sales in 2007, a 15-percent increase from 2006. According to Frank Salera, franchisee of Saladworks in Deptford, the four-year-old store experienced double-digit growth in the first three years of being open.

"We are in the top 10 as far as sales growth," Salera said.

Salera, who has 26 years in the restaurant business, and his wife, Carol, came upon Saladworks while they were looking for a business to run together. When their daughter got a salad from the Saladworks in the Moorestown Mall, they visited a free-standing unit and liked what they saw.

"We liked the layout and liked the atmosphere," he said. "We called up the franchise and said we liked Saladworks and saw this being built."

Salera and his wife also operate the two-year-old location in Washington Township and are in the process of buying two more stores, which places them among the company's 70-percent of multi-unit operators.



Staff photo by Tim Hawk

From left, Gloucester County College students Jessica Vance and Sam Bennett eat lunch at the Saladworks in Deptford.

James Dooney owns six stores, including one in Glassboro, and is opening two more this year.

"It is a healthier concept. People are more conscious of the way they eat," Dooney said. "The funniest thing is when I first opened I didn't realize how much people wanted it. There were no real alternatives out there in a quick-casual atmosphere. I look around and everybody's doing

salads now. I saw that was coming, other people see the same."

Dooney, who previously worked in the produce business, purchased his first unit in Wayne, Pa. in 1998.

"Being my own boss is most rewarding, but it's also being part of a concept that people love," he said. "They love this concept. I get inquiries on 'How do I become a franchisee?' every week."

According to Scardapane, prospective franchisees need \$80,000 to \$100,000 in cash to open a Saladworks. The total cost is between \$425,000 to \$450,000, but that can be financed through several lenders.

Saladworks also periodically hosts open houses where they go through a presentation on the company followed by a question-and-answer session. Those who are still interested can then sign up for a discovery day where they spend a day with the sales department. The next step is an interview process with at least four different department heads.

"If any one of the department heads feels it's not a good fit, we don't move forward with the franchise prospect," Scardapane said. "Getting into these deals is pretty easy and getting out is the hard part."