

Good retailers build every aspect of their stores around their customers' needs.
Progressive Grocer

OCTOBER 15, 2006 -- Wegmans mulling attack of the prepared food 'pods'

Regional independent Wegmans Food Markets, based in Rochester, N.Y., is reportedly using its flagship store in Pittsford, N.Y. to test a new modular meal solution concept that could eventually seed a move into a more fresh-centered format.

Wegmans executive chef Eric Wendorff told WHAM-TV, Rochester's channel 13, that the pilot program consists of meal solution stations. "We're calling them pods. They're really bars that are quick meal solutions."

The concept calls for a wide assortment of prepared foods to be made available to time-pressed families, so they can either eat the meals at the store or take them home.

Wegmans c.e.o. Danny Wegman told the station, "If we can make that work, we can build more smaller, more fresh food-oriented stores."

In the test, a vegetarian bar features vegetables, salads, and smoothies, while a seafood bar has a chef whipping up a variety of dishes. The company is also considering the inclusion of a bar with Italian food.

Wegmans said the pilot program has received positive response so far. If that continues, Wegmans will introduce the pods to other locations.

Balducci's salutes heritage with celebration of Italy

Bethesda, Md.-based specialty food retailer Balducci's is gearing up to pay homage to its heritage with a monthlong series of celebrity chef demonstrations, cookbook signings, classes, and tastings that will offer the authentic tastes and flavors of Italy.

Balducci's Italian Heritage Month celebration launched Oct. 7 with a featured variety of Italian fare in the prepared foods department, authentic Italian sandwiches in the delicatessen, and a choice of over 1,000 imported Italian products throughout the grocer's 10 stores.

Additionally, Balducci's has scheduled events for each of its locations, including appearances by celebrity chefs Roberto Donna of Galileo Restaurant and Frank Pellegrino of Rao's.

The authentic products offered over the course of the month include Italian imports Pastiglie Leone, Benedetto Cavalieri pasta, Caffarel chocolates, Amaretti Virginia, La Romagna pasta, La Valle San Marzano DOP tomatoes, Coelsanus antipasti vegetables, Casa Bruna tapenades, and Rustichella d'Abruzzo. The company is also featuring artisanal cheeses, authentically cured meats, and extra virgin olive oils from 15 Italian

regions. Additionally, the specialty food retailer is providing samples of three new sandwiches in the delicatessen, and four new pasta dishes in the prepared foods department.

The original Balducci's began as a fruit-and-vegetable stand in Brooklyn in 1916, run by a young immigrant from Corato-Bari, Italy named Louis "Pop" Balducci.

Starbucks debuting 'warm' foods in New York metro area

Testing the deli waters, Seattle-based Starbucks Coffee Co. is introducing a line of what it's calling "warm foods" in select New York metropolitan-area stores. Now coffee drinkers will be able to opt for a heated pastry or toasted Starbucks bagel, as well as four new warm breakfast sandwiches made from what the company calls "premium ingredients," and available all day long.

The chain's breakfast sandwich lineup consists of:

- Peppered bacon, egg, and natural aged cheddar cheese on a toasted English muffin;
- Sausage, egg, and natural aged cheddar cheese on a toasted English muffin;
- A reduced-fat sandwich with turkey bacon, cholesterol-free egg, and reduced-fat white cheddar cheese on a toasted whole wheat English muffin; and
- Virginia-style ham, egg, and fontina cheese on a toasted potato bagel.

The New York Starbucks will also offer two lunch items that can be eaten warm or cold: the Tomato Mozzarella Basil and Chicken Cheddar Club sandwiches. Additionally, New Yorkers in search of a snack will be able to buy Starbucks' warm toffee almond bar or heated chocolate chip cookies, according to the company.

"We are excited to offer our customers this delicious assortment of warm food options that represent the very best ingredients and product innovations that Starbucks has to offer," says Gretchen Bartkus, Starbucks regional food manager. "We are responding to our customers' requests to be able to purchase a warm breakfast sandwich or pastry along with their Starbucks beverage, and we are confident that these new offerings will enhance their Starbucks experience."

The breakfast sandwiches and warm pastries and lunch sandwiches will be offered at over 200 Starbucks stores in the New York metro area. Starbucks' goal is for most of its locations in the area to provide the warm food options by summer 2007.

Starbucks has nearly 12,000 retail locations in North America, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, and the Pacific Rim.