

Beef 'O' Brady's introduces new menu items

New selections part of larger food-and-beverage revamp

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Beef 'O' Brady's, the chain of “family sports pubs” based in Tampa, Fla., has introduced 10 new menu items as part of a long-term food-and-beverage revamp and just in time for the upcoming March Madness postseason for college basketball and spring training for Major League Baseball.

Among the new items are St. Louis-style ribs made with Sweet Baby Rays barbecue sauce, grilled shrimp available as a main entrée or in a salad, a build-your-own burger option, and mix-and-match desserts.

Beef 'O' Brady's said it also is introducing hand-breaded chicken tenders, an appetizer of chips and a new signature salsa, Poblano Chicken, and two new side dishes of seasoned rice and pub chips. The more upscale side dishes can be substituted at reduced prices for the complimentary sides now offered, the company said.

Chief executive Chris Elliott, who joined Beef 'O' Brady's last March when new owner Levine Leichtman Capital Partners took over the brand, said the new food items represent the first stage of a multiyear menu re-engineering project.

“We’re pulling our menu completely apart and putting it back together,” Elliott said. He said the company is following consumer research recommending that the chain “be more competitive,” make food “a bigger part of our story,” and emphasize quality.

“We’ve always stood for value, but like all chains we’re now trying to balance value, quality and protecting margins,” he said.

Elliott added that initial feedback on the new menu items was positive and producing encouraging trends in traffic and the average check.

The second phase of the menu project, which Elliott said is expected to be rolled out in September 2011, would involve improvements to the burger program, which would involve an upgrade to the patty to go along with a recently upgraded bun. The chicken wing sauces and rubs and nonalcoholic beverages Beef 'O' Brady's offers also will get a look during this phase. A lunch platform focused on smaller portions and high-quality offerings that can be executed quickly is part of this strategy as well.

By spring of 2012, Beef 'O' Brady's will complete a final stage that works any kinks out of the menu development program, Elliott said.

He added that the new menu lineup is meant to complement its recently developed "Beef's 2.0" new unit prototype. The blueprint of that space updates the color schemes and design elements of Beef 'O' Brady's traditional décor. The first new prototype is scheduled to open in Elizabethtown, Tenn., in March, and a second unit is expected to debut in Lake Jackson, Texas, in April.

"We started Beef's 2.0 last summer, looking into the future of casual dining from where we stand," Elliott said. "We're geared toward families and sports fans, which is a unique niche. So we had to ask, how do you accommodate families with children effectively and also have a full bar? We redesigned the restaurant to have two distinct areas without putting up walls, so you don't say, 'Adults over here, and families over there.'"

With the menu relaunch underway and the first two prototype restaurants being built, Beef 'O' Brady's should be in a position to capitalize on heightened exposure the brand gained from sponsoring the Beef 'O' Brady's Bowl in December, Elliott said.

"We're not taking the foot off the gas pedal at all," he said. "Now that there's a groundswell of interest, we expect to open between 15 and 20 new locations this year and to sell about that many new development deals. That may be modest for some chains, but it's kind of a restart for us."

Beef 'O' Brady's has 220 casual-dining locations in 21 states.