

Ones to Watch by Sherri Daye

A BETTER SANDWICH SHOP

The specialty café is hardly a new idea. Neither is placing one in a retail setting. Neiman's in-store café and to-die-for chocolate chip cookies are almost as legendary as the emporium itself. And you can find a panini in any mall foodcourt worth its plastic trays. So why is there a buzz building around the growth plans of Coco Moka Café, the new sandwich/coffeehouse café concept slowly finding its place in the nation's foodcourts and department stores? One word for you: positioning.

Coco Moka Café is designed for anyone whose lifestyle includes regular visits to a retail center, from the ladies-who-lunch who frequent Macy's to the teens who cruise mall foodcourts. "Everything has been

since the '80s and specialty gifts.

But it wasn't always that way. When Rosenberg and his team opened the prototype of what would eventually become Coco Moka in the late '90s, the idea was simply to increase traffic at Candy Express. "Nobody was eating a Snickers at 9 A.M. We noticed that Starbucks was pretty busy at that hour." Together with Seattle Best Coffee, Rosenberg opened a coffeehouse/candy shop in a Vancouver, Canada, Hudson Bay department store. The menu also included pastries and gelato.

Two years later, Macy's West

ment store chain to open units in 10 U.S. cities. 'Nuff said, we think.

FROM C-STORE TO QUICK-SERVE

Nothing irks Barry Applebaum more than someone slapping a few slices of shaved steak on a hoagie and calling it a cheesesteak. Given a forum, he'll rant about the imposters for hours. What he serves at his Grilladelphia



thought of to create the right atmosphere and experience for this concept," says David Rosenberg, president of Candy Express, Inc, parent company of Coco Moka Café. "The entire store environment is geared towards customers who prefer to be in a store like Coco Moka Café."

A store like Coco Moka Café includes a menu of signature artisan bread sandwiches and decadent desserts. Its ambience is decidedly upscale and hip, designed to attract the teens who told market research folks they wanted to "shop in a cool store." That's right. Coco Moka is more than merely a restaurant. It is also a retail center in its own right, offering the packaged and bulk candy that has made Candy Express a mall favorite

caught wind of the concept and came calling. "They liked the fact that candy expanded the daypart beyond coffee. But they also asked, 'Can you also do soup, salads, and sandwiches?'"

Rosenberg decided he could, and Coco Moka Café was born, much to the delight of retail center landlords everywhere who love the concept because of the versatility of its design. Whether a landlord is looking for restaurant or a coffeehouse or a bakery, Coco Moka fits the bill, an alternative to both Starbucks and Panera.

WHY IT BEARS WATCHING: Insiders say Coco Moka is in negotiations with a major depart-

shops is the real deal, he says, complete with processed cheese spread and tomatoes, if you want 'em.

Applebaum's main gig is running the three Exxon-branded c-stores he owns in the greater Philadelphia area. In fact, he opened his first Grilladelphia inside his Port Richmond station. But as the fuel business begins to look less lucrative, the Pennsylvania native has turned his attention to taking his steak shops beyond his c-stores.

Already he has opened a 200-square-foot unit inside a Philly Italian restaurant in a deal that calls for a 50/50-revenue split with the owner of the Italian eatery and minimal investment costs for Applebaum. "I don't have to buy anyone out. I don't have to sign a long-term lease, and I don't have to lay out any cash. Where's the risk in that?" says Applebaum. As part of the agreement, Grilladelphia gets outside sig-