



Blaze Pizza Launches Into Fast-Casual Dining With Two Locations Set To Open This Summer

Critically-Acclaimed Pizza Chef Bradford Kent Innovates With Freakishly Fast, "Co-Created", Artisanal Pizzas

May 3, 2012. Pasadena, CA – Blaze Fast-Fire'd Pizza, a new concept in fast-casual dining, will open two locations in Pasadena and Irvine this summer. A creation of Elise and Rick Wetzel (founder of Wetzel's Pretzels) and backed by investors including Maria Shriver, movie producer John Davis and Boston Red Sox co-owner Tom Werner, Blaze Pizza features the talents of Executive Chef Bradford Kent, owner of Los Angeles' top rated Olivo Pizzeria & Cafe (Zagat's #2 pizza in Los Angeles). The company plans to open additional locations in the coming months through franchising.

Blaze Pizza uses a "co-created", assembly line format (similar to Chipotle Mexican Grill®), that lets guests customize one of the menu's signature pizzas or create one of their own, choosing from a wide selection of fresh, artisanal toppings -- most included for no extra charge. The generously sized personal pizzas are then sent to a blazing hot open-hearth oven, the centerpiece of the eatery, where dedicated pizzasmiths ensure that the thin-crust pies are "fast-fire'd" in a scant 120 seconds. Blaze Pizza will make its own dough from scratch using a recipe Kent developed, which requires a 24-hour fermentation period to produce his signature light-as-air, crisp crust. Blaze's menu will use fresh ingredients ranging from inventive to classic and accommodate certain dietary needs, with a gluten-free dough and vegan cheese option.

"This is an opportunity for me to take the years I've spent developing my dough recipe and bring it to a broader audience," says Chef Kent. "My Olivo customers are big fans of the crust. I think they see it as a perfect, simple base that lets them get really creative with the fresh vegetables, meats and sauce on top."

To create a fast-casual environment that is comfortably hip with a "soul", Blaze Pizza has teamed with principal designer Ana Henton of MASS Architecture and Design (Intellegentsia, Lukshon, Breadbar) to design the restaurants' interior and exterior. Designed to be casual, current and hip, Henton is using architectural notes inspired by fire and foundries. Additionally, the restaurant has gone to great lengths to see that its packaging (with a playful graphic style) is eco-friendly -- made in the USA from post-consumer recycled and/or sustainable materials. www.blaze-pizza.com/pizzaboxgraphics

Pizza in the United States is big business – with an estimated 65,000+ pizzerias generating more than \$35 billion in sales annually. Still, the Wetzels believe that there is a sizable opportunity in the rapidly-growing fast-casual segment. "Today, most take-out, delivery and dine-in pizza places fall short for discerning pizza fans looking for a quick bite," says Rick Wetzel, Blaze Pizza's chief ideator. "We're able to deliver an unbelievably good pizza, lightning fast, at a very affordable price".

Blaze Pizza's first two stores will be company-owned and operated. Going forward, the company plans to grow through a combination of both company-owned and franchise locations, with franchise sales expected later this year. The first location, a 2,600 sq. ft., 90-seat space near UC Irvine in the University Center is scheduled to open in July. The second, a 2,800 sq. ft., 100-seat location in Pasadena, CA, is set to open in the city's vibrant Theater

District in September. Both locations will offer a selection of wine and craft beer, and will feature outdoor patios for afternoon and evening dining.

How it works

- It's so fresh that every pizza starts with a perfectly proofed dough ball and -- right before your eyes -- you watch as it's pressed into a generous 11-inch super-light pizza crust.
- Our assembly line format lets you "co-create" one of our personal-sized signature pizzas (add on most toppings at no extra charge), or create your own -- with ingredients ranging from more artisan and inventive (marinated artichokes, gorgonzola, roasted red peppers, arugula) to classic favorites, often with a contemporary twist (perlini mozzarella, cherry tomatoes, sauce drizzles and dollops).
- After topping, we send your pizza to our oven to be "fast-fire'd". The blazing hot open-hearth oven is the centerpiece of the store-- and key to our quality and lightning fast speed.
- You may opt for one of our signature salads -- like the Antipasto or Caprini -- or create your own from our fresh selection of greens, toppings and house-made dressings. You choose it & we'll build it.
- Your last step is to select a beverage and pay -- feeling good, as you'll typically be out less than \$10 for your generously sized, personal pizza and a drink. By the time you've paid and grabbed a table, your crisp-crust pizza is ready to devour.

About Us

Headquartered in Pasadena, CA, Blaze Pizza is the pioneer of a new fast-casual restaurant category that serves artisanal, "co-created" pizzas at freakishly fast speeds, all at a very affordable price. Launched by Elise & Rick Wetzel (founder of Wetzel's Pretzels), and featuring the talents of Chef Bradford Kent of Olio Pizzeria & Café, Blaze Pizza plans to develop 15+ Southern California locations by the end of 2013, and to partner with franchisees to grow into a national brand. The first two Blaze Pizza restaurants will debut at Irvine's University Center (July, 2012) and Pasadena's Theater District (September, 2012). To learn more, please visit www.Blaze-pizza.com or www.facebook.com/BlazePizza.

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