

## Bus-taurants

The latest extension of the food truck trend, “bustaurants,” or buses converted into restaurants, are opening across the country, notably on the West Coast. For instance, Le Truc, based in the San Francisco area, is a 36-ft. former school bus that offers healthful gastro-pub fare and seats 12, reported *Specialty Food Magazine* (January/February 2011). St. Paul, MN-based Magic Bus Cafe is a converted 1978 school bus that offers seating. The bus specializes in various hot dogs, including the Buffalo Springfield Dog and the Peace Frog Dog, reported *Minnesota Public Radio* (July 25, 2011).

## Smaller Foodservice Outlets

Just as in retail, many foodservice operators are looking to smaller formats for further entry in non-traditional avenues such as sports arenas, airports, malls and universities. Smaller formats also have lower operating costs, a top foodservice priority in this economic environment. Reducing a restaurant’s size to 7,280-sq. ft from 8,100-sq. ft. could save \$153,000 per unit in development costs alone, according to restaurant design and development firm WD Partners, reported *Dow Jones Newswires* (Feb. 22, 2011). Chains making inroads in this segment include Red Robin Gourmet Burgers, Inc., Steak ‘n Shake and Denny’s. P.F. Chang’s China Bistro is also evaluating alternatives to its typical 3,200-sq. ft. design.

Cheesecake Factory Inc. is revamping its 13-unit Grand Lux Cafe chain, lowering prices by about \$2 and introducing a new prototype. The new model, set to open in early 2012, will be about 8,500-sq. ft., down from the 11,000-sq. ft. prototype, and feature less formal decor, reported *MarketWatch* (June 15, 2011).

Red Robin Gourmet Burgers, Inc. is pursuing a test of a smaller prototype restaurant to complement its current 5,600-sq. ft. casual dining format. The smaller prototype restaurant will be between 2,000- and 4,000-sq. ft. and features a modified menu and service format. The company aimed to have at least one smaller prototype location open before the end of 2011, with locations suitable for the prototype identified primarily in the Denver area. The company will evaluate how the unit performs before deciding on expansion plans, which would involve non-traditional locations.

Casual dining brand East Coast Wings & Grill opened a quick-service On-the-Go prototype in Greenville, NC on Jan. 31, 2011. The prototype, in development for three years, was modeled after other chicken-wing quick-serve concepts. Executives expect to operate 70 to 75 On-the-Go units in the next five years. Locations are sized between 1,400-sq. ft. and 1,800-sq. ft. and have 35 menu options, including wings, burgers, sandwiches, salads and wraps, reported *QSR Magazine* (Feb. 11, 2011).

Fox and Hound Restaurant Group debuted a smaller prototype in Harrisburg, PA. The prototype is about 7,000-sq. ft., compared to the standard 9,000-sq. ft. outlet. The concept features lighter colors, updated décor, a sports ticker and televisions. The chain also introduced a chainwide menu revamp, adding items including upgraded pizzas and pot-roast sliders, reported *Nation’s Restaurant News* (Apr. 20, 2011).

Garden Fresh Restaurant Corp., operator of 40 Souplantation and 78 Sweet Tomatoes full-scale restaurants, opened quick-serve restaurant concept Souplantation Express in Carlsbad, CA. The format, which can fit in as little as 1,500-sq. ft. and various venues, allows customers to choose from over 30 ingredients to customize their salad. Other menu offerings include five made-from-scratch soups, macaroni and cheese, garlic asiago focaccia breads and chocolate chip cookies. Four were planned to open in 2011. Also, an Express version of its Sweet Tomatoes chain was planned for outside of California, reported *Nation’s Restaurant News* (Dec. 14, 2010).

The Gordon Biersch Brewery Restaurant Group, operator of the 29-unit Gordon Biersch dinnerhouse chain, opened Gordon Biersch Tavern, a 60-seat, 1,400-sq. ft. unit at the Westfield Galleria mall in Roseville, CA. The outlet features a limited menu of signature dishes such as American-style Kobe sliders, mahi mahi fish tacos, garlic fries and certain handcrafted beers. The concept was in development for the past two years and has an average check of \$11. Two or three additional Gordon Biersch Tavern locations were planned to open in 2011; four or five will open in 2012 as