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## Baton Rouge hits Calgary

CALGARY—Baton Rouge recently opened its first location in Western Canada, in southwest Calgary.

Maria Kostaras, Paul Mason and Jordan Thomson are the franchise owners and they have let the company know of their interest in opening more outlets in the city. Kostaras and Mason also own Halo Steak Seafood and Wine Bar in Calgary, which they opened in 2006.

Nancy Cogger, director of marketing with Baton Rouge, said the company has not set a specific target for the number of stores it plans to open in Western Canada, but every province is under consideration.

Baton Rouge recently completed a market analysis for entire country, laying out where and how many restaurants each city can handle. Major markets are being targeted under the company's franchised expansion plans.

"This is our first foray into Western Canada with a Quebec perceived brand," Cogger said.

"We want to gauge the success in Calgary, but the initial indications are Calgarians are embracing Baton Rouge. All four western provinces are on the radar."

She said the company is also exploring how to take the concept from larger urban centres to mid-sized cities like London and Kitchener, Ontario, for example. Those locations would likely be a little smaller than those in larger cities. Any expansion will be franchised-based.

The Calgary location has the traditional Baton Rouge design of rich wood and red leather, as well as a tin ceiling, with a brightly tiled bar area, which has been expanded.

"The menu is basically the same (but) the restaurant layout is a little bit different," Cogger said.

"We aren't a steakhouse. We are a rib house and we also happen to serve steak and seafood. We have been very careful in advertising in positioning Baton Rouge as the best place for ribs."

A Halifax location is also in the works, slated to open early in 2011, as the first Baton Rouge in Atlantic Canada.

"People can soon expect to see the Baton Rouge name stretch from coast to coast," said company COO Kevin Friesen.

## Fresh Bowl serves traditional Malay

VANCOUVER—It's taken three years, and two incarnations of his Malaysian restaurant, but persistence has paid off for Tommy Ng.

The Malaysia native, whose family has a long history in the foodservice business back in their homeland, started Jonker Street Restaurant in 2007, specializing in Malaysian cuisine.

The mom and pop eatery was barely hanging on when

handled the redesign and rebranding strategy for Fresh Bowl.

Turner worked with Moeksi interior designer Karin Bohne, who came up with the colour scheme and look for the 720-square foot restaurant. There is seating for 12 inside and 12 on the patio.

Fresh Bowl focuses mainly on take out and delivery for its business, given the small interior space, which includes a lot of bright yellow, green and orange.

"We took the food as inspiration, something that would fit a franchise look. We wanted to go with something that would look contemporary, as there was definitely going to be multiple units," Turner said.

Expansion of the restaurant is already in the works, with two more units planned for Vancouver in 2011, both of which will be corporately owned.

Ng is looking to have all the delivery and supply systems in place before embarking on franchised expansion, but that is in the plans as well.



Ng decided to change the name to Fresh Bowl, which still features Malay food. Since opening in January, the Yale-town crowd has responded to the changes.

Sales are up 250 per cent from what they were as Jonker Street, and have continued to increase as much as 40 per cent each month since June.

"The numbers keep growing, especially since they've introduced a quality online ordering system. The numbers they opened to were through the roof," said Brett Turner, a restaurant consultant with Moeksi Consulting, which

Turner said the company has already received interest from parties looking to become franchisees, mainly in larger centres across Canada and the United States. Franchise inquiries have already come in from Calgary, Toronto and California.

A central kitchen will be established where the curry paste will still be made by hand by Ng's wife Grace. The ingredients for the base are a closely guarded family secret. Once the paste is made, it will be sent off to the individual locations where staff crafts the dishes around it.

## Hospitality in transition at HIC meet

VANCOUVER—The theme for the 2010 British Columbia Hospitality Industry Conference and Exhibition is "Hospitality in Transition: Maximizing the Possibilities."

The event takes place November 21–23 at both the Fairmont Waterfront Hotel and Vancouver Convention Centre.

"The way we have tailored this is to provide people with solid tangible tools for delegates and give them opportunities to network," said event organizer Nora Cumming.

"We want to make sure people take away with them ideas to grow their business."

Delivering the keynote address is Jim Treliving, co-owner of Boston Pizza and one of the investors on CBC's *Dragon's Den*.

Web technology expert Todd Lucier is back to lead three workshops: Swimming with Sharks, Social Media for Beginners and Advanced Social Media.

Bonnie Buckhiester, owner of her own revenue management and hospitality industry consulting firm will discuss "Thrive vs. Survive: Six key steps for dealing with price wars."

Jason Cheskes, with Toronto-based Above The Line Solutions, is speaking on the topic of "Adversaries or partners? Improved mutual outcomes through enhanced operator-supplier relationships."

The Hospitality Expo at the Vancouver Convention Centre is Nov. 22–23 and is expected to attract 5,000 people checking out displays from 250 foodservice and hospitality exhibitors.