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Calistoga Bakery Cafe operators going national

By KATY BISHOP

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The timer went off at Calistoga Bakery Cafe: it's time for expansion.

The Naples-based coffee house and sandwich shop plans to open new locations in Coastland Center mall in Naples and Gulf Coast Town Center in San Carlos Park before Thanksgiving, and after that in Bonita Springs, Estero and in both Louisville and Lexington, Ky.

"It's all going to unfold here rather quickly in the next few months, even weeks," said Mark Bates, the Naples developer who opened the first cafe in Fountain Park plaza in summer 2005 at Airport-Pulling and Vanderbilt Beach roads.

One day, Bates hopes that there will be Calistoga Bakery Cafes all over the country, or even the world, he said. But for now, he and his partner John Schnatter, Papa John's founder and former chief executive officer, plan to have eight to 10 restaurants open by June 2008.

Bates has been working with Schnatter, Papa John's namesake, since spring 2006, he said. Schnatter lives in Kentucky and has a home in Naples.

The partnership was "just a perfect fit," Bates said. "He is enormously successful ... he has the experience. He took (Papa John's) from an idea to a major public company with more than 3,000 stores."

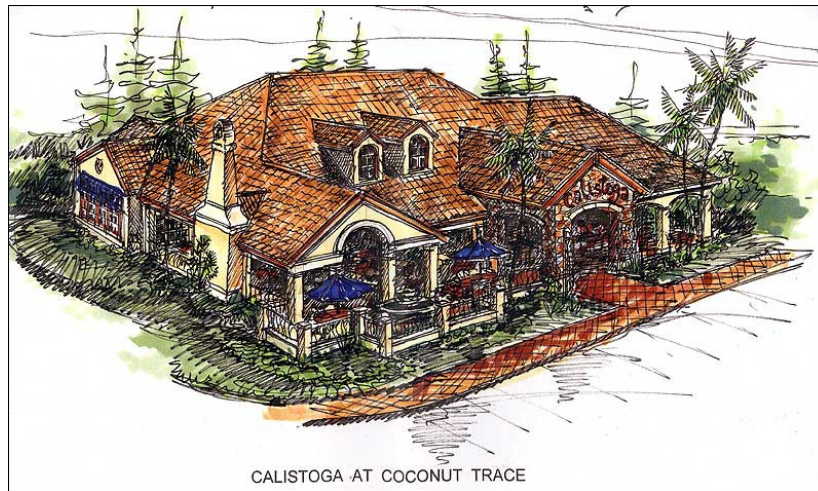
The concept for the Calistoga Bakery Cafe was born when Bates developed Fountain Park plaza in North Naples. He wanted a restaurant tenant to bring daytime traffic to the plaza, and rather than bringing in another company he decided to create his own concept, Bates said.

"I'm not a restaurant person, but as the founder I orchestrated it," said Bates, who has developed commercial real estate in Southwest Florida for about 15 years. "I brought together the team and took the risk. I can't play any of the instruments, but I was the conductor. And it's fun — when it works."

And so far, the concept has worked, Bates said.

"The first one opened in June of 2005 and it was successful immediately," he said. "And it just never stopped."

Calistoga is “an upscale sandwich shop, with a ... coffee and espresso bar,” free WiFi, free coffee refills and a relaxed atmosphere that encourages people to hang out, said Lance Tucker, who represents Schnatter’s business interests.



The partners are investing about \$1.5 million in each restaurant, not counting the real estate expenses, to make sure that the food, decor and atmosphere are just right, Bates said.

The Coastland Center location is connected to the food court on the South side of the mall, but also will have its own outside entrance, Bates said.

There will be a coffee window in the food court so customers can grab a cup of coffee without going through the main line, Tucker said. Or, if they want to sit and relax, there will be 80 to 100 seats inside and another 60 to 80 seats outside in a covered patio area with an outside fireplace.

The company has had inquiries from entrepreneurs about franchise options, and will “very likely franchise in the future,” Tucker said. “But we need to prove the concept works before we ask other people to put their money into it.”

“We’re in the quick-casual segment of the restaurant industry,” Bates said. “It’s upscale, casual, affordable, and it’s ... the fastest-growing segment of the restaurant industry. It’s ... where the market is right now.”

The Kentucky locations are set to open in the first quarter of 2008 and Bonita Springs will follow in the second quarter on U.S. 41, just south of West Terry Street. The Estero cafe, in Coconut Trace plaza on U.S. 41 across the street from Coconut Point mall, is planned for summer 2008.

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