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Putting green on the ‘front burner’

Front Burner Brands opts for a ‘stealth green’ program that saves on operating costs

By Maureen Wilkey

For Front Burner Brands, the multi-concept-restaurant management company that owns **The Melting Pot, Burger 21, and GrillSmith**, sustainability is no longer a trend—it’s a requirement. And franchisees embracing the company’s “stealth green” techniques are helping not only the brand, but also its bottom line.

“A huge part of the cost of running a restaurant is maintenance and repair,” says **Scott Evans**, director of design and construction for Front Burner Brands. “By putting in systems that require less of these, we’re saving both money and aggravation for our franchisees.”

The brand’s franchise renewal program is helping its 135 existing Melting Pot restaurants meet modern standards for green building. The design department specifies using a “stealth green” approach by selecting sustainable materials when there is no cost increase to franchisees, such as using low-VOC paint and adhesives or recycled materials.

Other updates include new lighting systems with LED technology and setting back HVAC temperatures at unoccupied times. Some restaurants have opted to put in tankless water heaters and efficient grease management systems to boost their return on investment.

“Some of these restaurants are more than 34 years old, and they can operate a lot more effectively using green systems that aren’t intrusive,” Evans says. “Plus, the updates create more efficiency so franchisees get the most bang for their buck.”

The company also is proactive when it comes to new construction projects for all three concepts. “Eventually, municipalities are going to start requiring more efficient systems so we’re trying to stay ahead,” Evans says.

For example, at Burger 21, low-temperature dishwashing systems save franchisees money on the cost of heating water, and high-efficiency light bulbs that don’t need to be changed as often free up workers’ time. Evans also points out that many of these systems are smaller, giving franchisees more room for customer seating.

While the brand is now requiring its franchises to meet a certain standard, the company isn’t forcing LEED certification. After building a LEED Gold space as part of Syracuse, New York’s Destiny USA, known as the largest green mall in the US, it determined that the cost of getting a professional to certify a building is unnecessary for existing franchisees.

Even without certification, Front Burner Brands can apply its own standards to its locations around the world. Evans says The Melting Pot in Dubai created efficiency for its roughly 3,200-square-foot space by sharing an underground water chiller system with other tenants in its development.

For restaurants everywhere, Evans says, this is just the beginning. “There are lots of improvements coming in the future for restaurants,” he says, “from refrigeration to LED lighting to variable speed fans.”

