

Retail News

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RETAIL SPOTLIGHT: OLIVES TOO

Olives co-owners Laurie Semon and Erin O'Hagan met while they were both working for Whole Foods in Los Angeles, Calif. One Sunday, they were having lunch in a local Long Beach restaurant and saw a "for lease" sign on an empty furniture store. They had both grown tired of years of a long commute and took a leap of faith; they decided to open a gourmet store in their own neighborhood. Within days, Olives Gourmet Grocer was born.

In October of 2004, Olives officially opened its first 1,700-square-foot retail location in a popular residential neighborhood in Long Beach, Calif. A real neighborhood store, it's the kind of place where customers are greeted by name and their favorites remembered. While it serves as a neighborhood anchor, providing grocery staples such as flour, milk and bread, the store also offers full service prepared foods, homemade specialties and hot meals every night. Olives also features a "small selection of a bunch of cool stuff," according to co-owner Laurie Semon. The product mix is approximately 60 percent prepared foods, 30 percent grocery (but growing significantly) and 10 percent kitchenware/entertaining accessories.

Merchandising

Prepared foods occupy the outer perimeter of the store, gourmet foods on the interior fixtures. Olives likes to make shopping simple for their customers who appreciate specialty foods. In the pasta section, it is customary to find pasta cookbooks, tongs, pasta pots, cheese graters and other related merchandise. In the cheese section, don't be surprised to find wooden platters and serving trays, cheese knives, graters and other cheese-related products. There is also a heavy seasonal focus and Olives offers Culinary and Gourmet Tasting Classes throughout the year.

According to Semon, Olives also tries to support small independent companies — artisan makers of cheese, wine or any specialty product. "Our philosophy is that we support small



businesses like ourselves," she explained. "Because we are small, we can respond rather quickly to customer needs. We also focus on constantly adding new products — whether it be from the local community or what we feel is the 'best' of something."

Olives Too is Born

With an already successful store under their belt, Semon and O'Hagan thought it was time to expand their popular concept. Just four short years after opening Olives, they opened their second location, Olives Too, a 3,000-square-foot store located in a more densely populated area of the same city. The larger space affords Semon and O'Hagan the opportunity to offer their customers more kitchenware and entertaining accessories — from Viking cookware to Mario Batali's line of kitchen essentials to cookbooks inviting them to explore the world of food.

To stock their store chock-full of the latest and greatest products, the co-owners have relied heavily on the LA Mart showrooms since their beginning in 2004. Semon said that when they visit the building, they walk virtually all the hallways and visit all the showrooms to find their next new star product. In fact, the two have become such familiar faces at the Mart over the years, the Gus Dallas showroom nominated Olives Too for "Retailer of the Month" during last month's August "Gourmet Month" at the LA Mart for their extensive industry knowledge, superior retail store and familiarity with the wholesale marketplace. Their innovative marketing and promotional strategies, strong Web presence and riveting visual merchandising also factored into Olives Too winning the "Retailer of the Month" award.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Throwback Sack Lunch Step Forward for Elephants Delicatessen

Portland-based Elephants Delicatessen has taken another step toward offering more sustainable options for customers with its new sack lunch delivery program. According to Anne Weaver, CEO of Elephants, the move from boxes to Elephants' own

brown paper sacks helps reduce packaging waste and honors the environmental impact concern expressed by customers. Every piece of packaging is now recyclable or biodegradable, with the exception of the plastic wrap for sandwiches. The new sack lunches are available for delivery or pickup at the Elephants Sack Lunch Delivery office — Central Kitchen on SE 7th Avenue, the NW 22nd Avenue store and the Kruse Way location in Lake Oswego. For more information about

delivery, call 503-238-8140 or order online at www.elephantsdeli.com.

Long Island Markets Tout Local Produce

To keep shipping costs down and nearby farms alive, Long Island's biggest chain of supermarkets, A&P, has agreed to offer more local produce for its banners, including Waldbaum's, Pathmark, Super Fresh and The

Food Emporium, *newsday.com* reported. Crates of vegetables, from corn to peppers, will now be adorned with “Grown on Long Island” placards — signs that are expected to be a mainstay from now on in the produce sections also of Super Fresh and The Food Emporium. The buy-local movement has been growing, fed by rising fuel prices and the environmental impact of trucking wares from long distances.

In July, the **Fresh Market** opened its doors in Chapel Hill in an area saturated with specialty food stores like Weaver Street Market and Whole Foods, *The Chapel Hill News* reported. The store is 24,600 square feet, one of the largest of Fresh Market’s 80 stores. The upscale market features 30 freshly baked breads, a coffee bar, fresh seafood imported multiple times per week, and prepared-to-go lunches on the premises. The store’s dim lights, classical music, on-site wine and cheese experts, and complimentary coffee offer shoppers an alternative experience.

Despite summer temperatures that reached 90 degrees, a crowd of dairy industry members, engineers and builders, local and state dignitaries, media and local residents gathered July 17 in Brattleboro, Vt., for the grand opening celebration for the **Grafton Village Cheese Company’s** newest production plant and retail store. Grafton Village Cheese, headquartered in Grafton, Vt., handcrafts artisanal aged cheddar cheese that is recognized for its quality and taste on a worldwide scale. The company is part of the Windham Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in Grafton, Vt., whose mission is to preserve the vitality of Vermont’s rural communities. The new Brattleboro retail shop is a 2,500-square-foot classic barn-like structure encompassing a full-service artisanal cheese shop. It offers more than 70 types of cheeses, wine, Vermont microbrews, fresh bread, maple products and other gourmet food items and accompaniments. As does its Grafton retail shop, the Brattleboro store features a large cheese-making viewing window, offering visitors an authentic Vermont cheddar experience.

Stop & Shop unveiled a new logo and redesigned store uniforms last month, in addition to



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expanding its prepared food section and further rolling out shopping assistance technology, the *Boston Herald* reported. The changes come as Stop & Shop is more than three-quarters finished with its aisle-by-aisle, price-rollback “value improvement program” at its stores from Massachusetts to New Jersey. The chain is also testing a product line called “Choose and Cook,” a refrigerated collection of fresh, color-coded food ingredients — meat, poultry or seafood, a vegetable,

starch and sauce — that can be combined into a meal for four in 20 minutes. The line, which comes with instruction for meals such as sirloin beef teriyaki and shrimp pad thai, is widely available in the stores of Stop & Shop’s sister companies in Europe. Stop & Shop is owned by Amsterdam-based Ahold. **GR**

Comments? kmontalvo@gourmetretailer.com

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