

Mr. B
Clothing
Means Thankful

DOW
30 INDUSTRIALS
11,905.59
-190.57

NASDAQ
COMPOSITE
2,639.61
-46.59

S & P
500
1,236.91
-20.90

BONDS
10-YEAR TREASURIES
2.01%
-0.05

GOLD
\$1,773.80
-\$7.90

CRUDE OIL
\$102.59
+\$3.22

Maid-Rite takes aim at next generation



Maid-Rite's new turkey wrap with a side of fresh-made chips.
MARY CHIND/
REGISTER PHOTOS



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The biggest unknown: Do fast-food customers want healthful fare?

Maid-Rite, the venerable Iowa-based fast-food chain that was re-launched by new owners five years ago, is expanding its menu to include more salads, wraps, shakes and other items aimed at younger and more health-conscious customers.

The new entrees include smoked turkey and smoked chicken sandwiches, as well as an expanded list of comfort foods familiar to Maid-Rite's older customer base of baby boomers and others who remember the diners of the 1950s and '60s.

Maid-Rite introduced the new menu a week ago at a company-owned store near the Jordan Creek mall and will be rolling it out to 70 franchised stores over the next three months, Chief Executive Bradley Burt said.

Initial reaction is very positive, said Executive Vice President Tania Burt. "People are raving about the new menu," she said. "The salads offer a healthy, light and filling choice. The feedback on the wraps is that they are very tasty and travel well to the tailgate."

Long-term success will depend on three things, said Ruth Litchfield, an associate professor of food science and human nutrition at Iowa State University.



One is the chain's ability to consistently control the taste and quality of nutrition in the new items. A second variable will be customers' perceptions over time of value in relation to price. And the third variable, which is the biggest unknown, she said, is whether fast-food customers truly want healthful alternatives.

Other fast-food chains have tried with limited success to convert customers to more healthful fare, Litchfield said.

"Restaurants are responding to demands that consumers are looking for options," she said. "But consumers need to back up that demand with actually purchasing the items. It's challeng-

ing for restaurants to continue offering these options if the buying power is not there."

The new menu reflects Maid-Rite's efforts to position itself to attract two audiences: The fast-food, in-out, travel crowd that wants to get back on the road or

From left, Maid-Rite executives Bradley Burt and Tania Burt, with corporate chef Jammie Monaghan holding one of the chain's new wrap sandwiches, and sous chef Ashton Cross holding one of the new salads, at Maid-Rite's Jordan Creek restaurant.

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MENU

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head for home as quickly as possible, and the more leisurely diner crowd that wants a comfortable surrounding where it can sit down and linger over an inexpensive meal.

Both groups want value, and Chief Executive Burt said the menu reflects that with \$7.99 salads, \$6.59 wraps, sandwiches from \$3.19 to \$5.99 and sandwich baskets from \$6.29 to \$8.99. The most expensive items on the menu are four entrees at \$9.89.

In addition to appealing to younger and more health-conscious consumers, Burt said the comfort-food additions will appeal to the chain's older clientele.

They include a saucer-sized, hand-breaded tenderloin sandwich, a new "Blue-Rite," which is the chain's signature loose-meat sandwich topped with blue cheese, and two new shake flavors, triple berry and peach.

There are also new side dishes, including sweet potato fries, buttermilk onion rings and potato and pasta salads.

The new items were created by Maid-Rite's corporate chef, Jammie Monaghan, with the idea that the chain's restaurants can easily add them without adding expensive new equipment in the kitchen, Burt said.

The only real expense for franchisees is buying the additional foods needed to prepare the new selections, he said.

Tania Burt said the chain is still doing a calorie analysis of the new salads and plans to post that information once it is available.



Maid-Rite's hickory smoked chicken with side dishes of corn and mashed potatoes. MARY CHIND/THE REGISTER

85-CENT SANDWICH

The launch of Maid-Rite's new menu was timed to coincide with the 85th anniversary of the opening of the first Maid-Rite store in Muscatine on Nov. 19, 1926. In recognition of the anniversary, the five corporate-owned Des Moines-area Maid-Rites will be selling the chain's signature loose-meat sandwich on Monday for 85 cents.

ISU's Litchfield said such transparency is increasingly important for consumers.

She cited the example of a national restaurant chain "that had a salad that was promoted as a healthy new option." But the salad was large and had a lot of salad dressing and cheese and a deep-fat fried shell around it. "By the time you figure all that in, it was higher in fat and higher in calories than the burger," she said.

That won't be the case with the Maid-Rite salads, which Tania Burt said use natural ingredients, including dressings, "that are healthier and naturally low in calories."