



## Fresh City CEO talks 'fresh fusion'

by [Valerie Killifer](#) \* • 23 Jun 2008

When Fresh City was founded by brothers Larry and David Reinstein in 1997, their focus was on a menu that partnered quality with quantity. Menu items revolved around the "fresh fusion" of ingredients and today consist of flavors found from all over the world.

The restaurant chain, with a large Northeastern presence, plans to open its first unit in Virginia in September and will continue to eye the East Coast for expansion.

We recently had the opportunity to speak with Fresh City president and CEO Larry Reinstein. Here's an inside look at what drives the growing chain.

**Our theme for this issue of Fast Casual magazine is research and development. Who is the primary person responsible for R&D at Fresh City and what are some of the ideas behind Fresh City's menu?**

Bruce (Larry's brother) is major in food development. I'll travel, see something I like and pass it along to him. In the end, we battle it out together to give the consumer the best product we can for the price.

It helps we've been in the restaurant business for 30 years and we've developed our own products over time. Bruce leads the charge. I would tell you, in the old days, I did a lot of the development, but in the last 15 years, that's been his world.

No. 1, everything for us is about freshness and No. 2, there has to be a level of simplicity. It can't be too complex because everything is made to order.

**How long does it take for a new item to be incorporated into Fresh City's menu?**

Typically, six months. Sometimes it's shorter, and sometimes it takes longer. They come out in specials, and it takes about four weeks to determine whether an item is working.

**How often do you change the menu?**

We change the menu once a year. Probably four to five items get deleted and four to five items get added. Nobody likes change, but change is necessary to move forward.

**What are some of the company's top-selling menu items?**

One of our new items doing extremely well is the Sedona Chicken sandwich. We're roasting our own chicken everyday, so it's fresh. It has a Southwest aioli spread that we make; it's sort of like a Southwest herb kind of seasoning. It's really, really good.

Our stir fry chicken with Kung Pao sauce does really well. Burritos do extremely well, and we have several versions. Again, one of the things that makes our food better is proprietary items such as dressings, soups and sauces. There are lots of items we do because we believe the little things can make all the difference.

**You recently joined the Fast Casual Alliance. What do you hope the Alliance will accomplish for the fast-casual restaurant industry?**

I'm a firm believer in the category. I think it's going to get bigger and bigger as it goes along. One big question is what does the guest see? What is QSR? What is fast casual?

Everything seems to morph into each other, and I think the guest in general looks at the quality of the environment and the quality of the ingredients. I think even QSR is trying to hit the fast casual mark.

I'm interested in getting it established in a stronger place. The more people we can get out and talking about the strength of the industry, the better.

**Where would you like to see the fast-casual segment in the next 10 years?**

What I see happening is it becoming easier to have managers and team members out there because it's getting easier, but it has historically been hard getting people with experience in fast casual. We expect a greater level of service and we expect a greater level of food [quality] than in QSR.

I see the FC segment, in essence, growing more and more. I think the morphing of fast casual, QSR and casual dining is going to be interesting. I see lots and lots and lots of changes. I just would like to see fast casual be in a strong position in the future, and I know it will be.

**If you were to give any restaurant industry advice to those just starting out, what would it be?**

My advice is that, No. 1, anything is possible. No. 2, it's all about the guest and it's all about your team. If you take good care of your team, they will take good care of your guest.

In this industry, there's still a lot of blocking and tackling, and it's really about taking care of the fundamentals to be successful. If you want to be in any segment of the foodservice industry, you have to practice the fundamentals every single day. It's a great business and a business of great opportunity. We have to deliver on the promise every day