

Convenience Store News

Stagnito

WHAT'S HOT IN CONVENIENCE AND PETROLEUM RETAILING

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Casey's Reinvigorated

Couche-Tard's failed takeover attempt just strengthened the resolve of Casey's management team, which continues to post record results.

Spotlight on Cold Vault, Foodservice, Freezer Case and more

Retailer Focus on MAPCO, Applegreen, Weigel's, Murphy Oil, Royal Farms and more

Going for Picture-Perfect

Sayle Oil is a stickler for consistency, even in how its food matches its menu images

By Renée M. Covino

When hunger strikes Billy Greene, director of operations for Charleston, Miss.-based Sayle Oil, he shops for a meal with his eyes as much as his stomach.

“I hate when I order something and it comes out looking nothing like the menu picture,” he told *Convenience Store News*. “It’s a pet peeve of mine.”

Greene has taken this personal standard and made it into one he holds his chain’s branded foodservice provider, Chester’s International LLC, accountable to as well. The result: “Our food looks like the pictures,” he said of its chicken program.

How is that achieved? Reportedly through preparation and daily checks by Greene and the store staff. Greene’s mantra is “it’s all about consistency.” He’s in the stores daily and the first thing he does is walk straight to the food case to make sure it looks as good as it did the day before — not cooked too long — and consistently appetizing.

Greene credited the Chester’s training program for its part, explaining that all managers go through the training session and are food-certified. They then, in turn, train the store employees so that everyone is privy to the high standards that must be adhered to daily. There are also dedicated cooks in the back who do nothing but prepare the chicken.



There’s a reason why this Sayle Oil offering of Chester’s chicken looks as good as the menu pictures above it: Billy Greene, director of operations, is a stickler for consistency.

Currently, Sayle Oil operates 12 Gas Marts in Mississippi; three of them include a Chester’s chicken program with one more “on the books” for this winter, according to Greene. The tentative near-future expansion plan is for six to eight more locations to have branded foodservice, preferably Chester’s, in the next one to three years.

“Our top three stores in sales all have Chester’s in them,” Greene reported.

Its top store in Water Valley,

Miss., racks up about \$10,000 more in sales a month than its next-best location. This store is close to a number of small factories, so customers take advantage of the chicken program both during the day and to take a meal home to their families for dinner. Customers have told Greene they appreciate being able to get in and out so quickly, especially given their time constraints of a 30-minute break.

The goal is to keep Chester’s “as consistent as possible,”



FOODSERVICE

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Greene reiterated. “Being in small towns and rural areas, a lot of our customers travel back and forth, with some passing through more than one of our stores in a week’s time.”

With an across-the-board food operation, customers know what to expect in how the program is run and how it looks and tastes. “We use the same products, the same signage, the same promotions,” Greene said.

Going with a proven program is the backbone for Sayle Oil’s foodservice consistency and why it partnered with Chester’s in the first place. Greene reviewed several programs and found Chester’s to score well on flexibility, startup costs, support/continuous training and the versatility of foodservice equipment.

And, not to mention, the six-foot costumed Chester’s chicken mascot utilized at grand openings and other events, shaking his tail feathers in the parking lot, offering chicken samples and drawing crowds, according to Greene. This is good publicity not only for the chicken program, but for the stores overall, he said.

Getting the Chester’s word out



The six-foot costumed Chester’s chicken mascot is good for publicity.



Sayle Oil’s top three stores in sales all have a Chester’s inside, featuring the same products, signage and promotions.

to customers is also made easy through a quarterly point-of-purchase kit, provided by Chester’s International, which includes signage and suggested promotions. The offer as of press time was four chicken tenders — the top item for Greene’s stores — and four potato logs for \$5.

Greene believes in utilizing store signage as much as possible to advertise meal deals such as these. He is cognizant that Subway’s “five-dollar deal” on footlong sandwiches, created a few years back, still resonates with customers and makes a \$5 deal the magic number, as long as it can be done right.

“With teenagers running around still singing that [Subway commercial] song, I know I have to cater to it,” he quipped.

Sayle Oil offers Chester’s promotions that it creates in-house, too. It recently included flyers in customers’ bags highlighting take-home dinner meals of eight and 20 pieces of chicken. With deals, as well as with the program in general, a good margin on the chicken is 50 percent, but a more realistic one is

40 percent, Greene said.

He praises Chester’s above other food court options. “I’ve been with the company 22 years, and we’ve done pizza, Subway sandwiches and everything else, but to my knowledge, Chester’s chicken is the most successful because we don’t seem to have as much shrink — losses are reduced [and] there isn’t as much throw-away.”

Greene added that chicken has a longer shelf life if maintained at the proper temperature, so you can cook it in smaller quantities and keep it fresh, and people seem to purchase it more often. He acknowledged that with the pizza program in one of the chain’s other stores, there is definitely more waste.

With Chester’s, there is also more potential for sales because the product menu is not limited to one or two items. “It’s good for our food business when the customer comes in on Monday, knowing he doesn’t have to eat the same thing when he comes back on Wednesday,” Greene reasoned. ■

For comments, please contact **Renée M. Covino**, Contributing Editor, at reneek@aol.com.