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INSIGHTS

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champion nutrition
against all odds.
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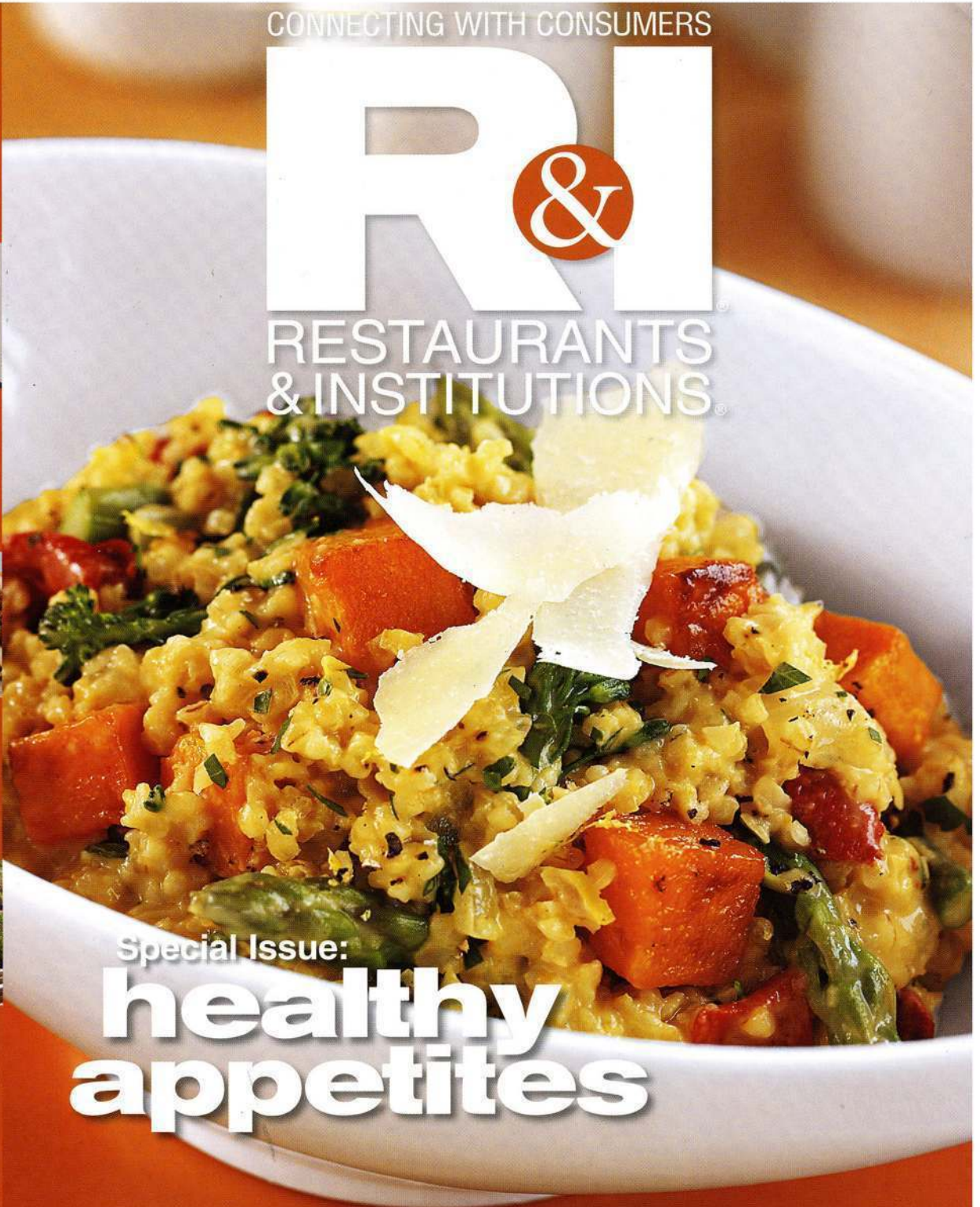
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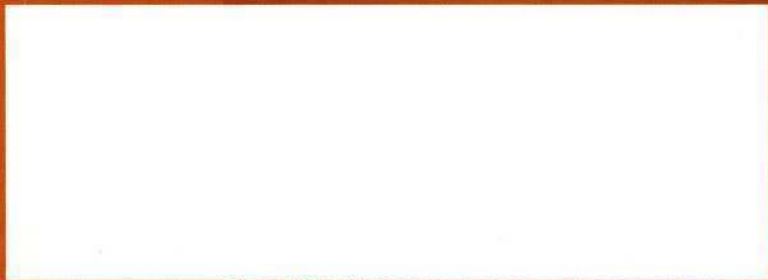
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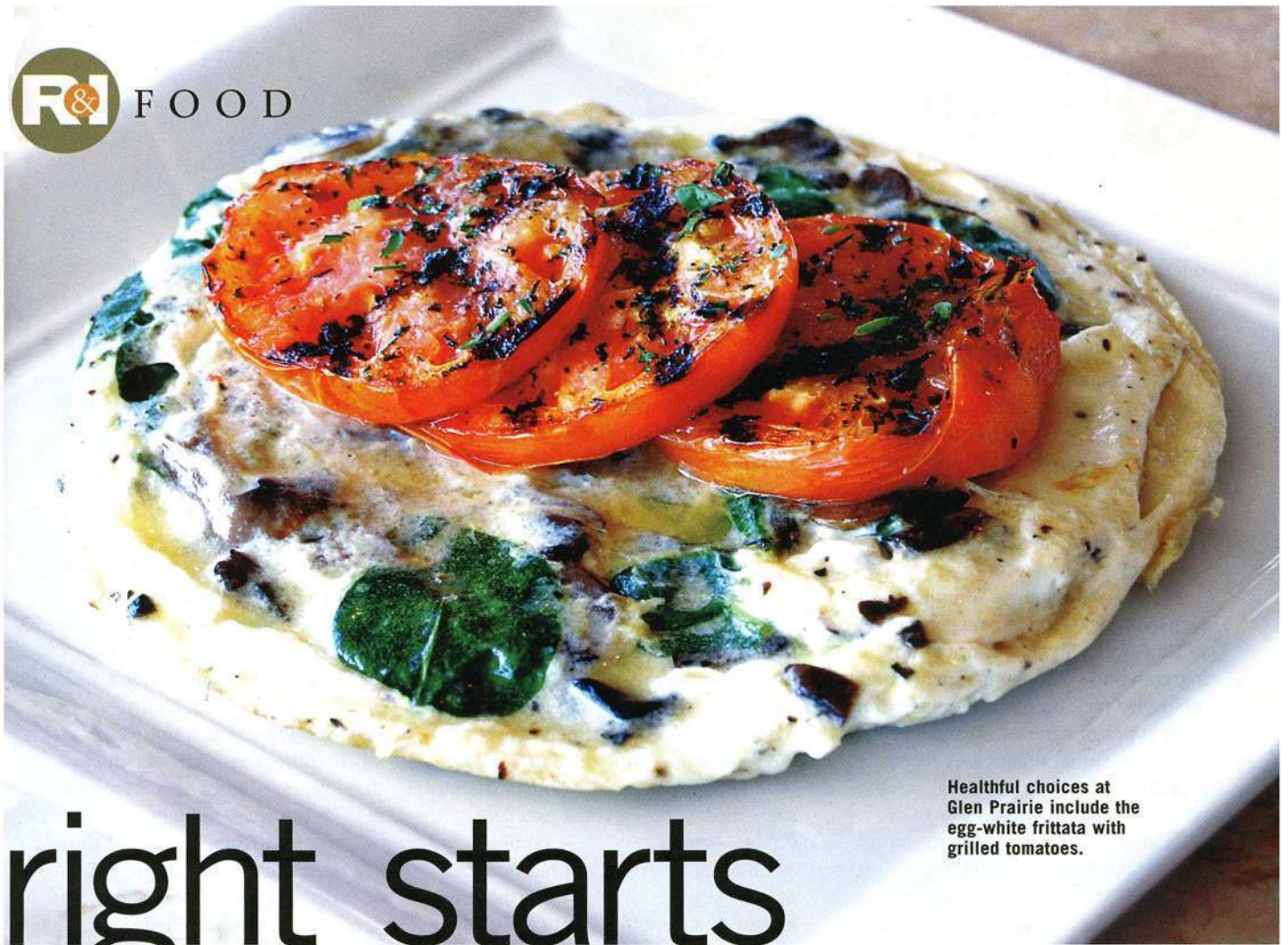
healthy appetites

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**Creative Vegetarian
Entrées with Broad Appeal**

**Exploring Consumers' Real
Attitudes About Healthful Eating**





Healthful choices at Glen Prairie include the egg-white frittata with grilled tomatoes.

right starts

Operators are answering the call for healthful menu choices with better-for-you breakfasts.

By Leah A. Zeldes, Special to R&I

Busy and on the go in the morning, consumers don't always approach breakfast with nutrition in mind. In R&I's 2010 New American Diner Study, when asked at which meal they're most likely to try to eat more healthfully, just 13.2% of consumers chose breakfast, compared with 27.4% at lunch and 43.7% at dinner.

Yet digging a bit deeper suggests that these inclinations may be driven more by a lack of opportunity than a lack of interest. In a recent survey by Chicago-based market researcher Technomic, nearly half of the consumers polled cited a healthful nutrition profile as an important or extremely important

attribute in breakfast foods. And food-service professionals say that when tasty and attractively priced healthful choices are on offer, customers are open to starting their days in wholesome ways—especially when recipes go beyond routine egg-white omelets and bran muffins.

"Breakfast is the time of the day when our guests are open to healthier choices," says Cyril Renaud, chef-owner of New York City's Bar Breton, which serves weekend-brunch dishes such as a whole-grain buckwheat galette (a Brittany-style crêpe) with goat cheese and sun-dried tomatoes. "These items sell very well," Renaud says. "We are pleased by the responses and the com-

ments we receive about having healthier options available on the menu."

Daniel Ovanin, chef at Glen Prairie in Glen Ellyn, Ill., says that healthful a.m. alternatives such as the wild-mushroom-and-spinach egg-white frittata and the "heart healthy breakfast" (fruit, house-made breakfast bread and organic yogurt) are much appreciated by his clientele, many of whom come from the adjacent Crowne Plaza Hotel.

"We have lots of business travelers who order these items when they stay with us," he says, noting that although more-indulgent items still are popular, not all guests want to start the day with a heavy breakfast.

LIGHTER PRICES, TOO

In a June 2009 survey from Chicago-based researcher Mintel, 54% of respondents said eating healthfully at restaurants is more expensive than not eating healthfully. That's > 22

<21 not necessarily true at breakfast, operators say.

“Breakfast is the best opportunity to promote healthy eating ... [and] the ingredients are less expensive than [for] lunch fare and dinner entrées,” says Ken Toong, executive director of dining and retail services at the University of Massachusetts (UMass) in Amherst, where students can order such nutritious morning choices as whole-grain pancakes or omelets with low-fat cheese and low-sodium salsa.

At Energy Kitchen, a 10-unit, health-focused quick-service concept based in New York City, lower prices are luring grab-and-go consumers who might otherwise pick up morning meals from other types of eateries, says concept President Anthony Leone. A recent promotion for \$2.99 breakfast sandwiches—all containing fewer than 500 calories and made without oil or butter—has helped push same-store sales up 50% from the same time last year, he says. Among Energy Kitchen’s



A unique wrap from Energy Kitchen pairs lean bison meat with egg whites in a whole-wheat wrap.

more-unique offerings is the 473-calorie bison-and-egg wrap, which combines egg whites with the lean protein in a whole-wheat wrapper.

Even without special offers, healthful dining typically costs consumers less at breakfast because many favorites at that daypart are meatless, notes Phil Palmer, owner of Atlanta breakfast-and-lunch cafe Radial, where only a handful of choices on the extensive morning menu contain meat. Especially popular with customers is the vegan hash, made with tofu and sautéed vegetables.

“We marinate the tofu for two days with lemon juice, grainy mustard and soy sauce, which gives it excellent flavor,” Palmer says. “We sauté it in a small amount of oil with red potatoes, onions, peppers, broccoli, mushrooms and fresh sage. It’s a pretty simple dish,

but very good. It also sells well.” Some customers request an optional topping of cheese, so Palmer knows vegans aren’t the only ones ordering it.

‘STEALTH HEALTH’

At UMass, where Toong says breakfast is a fast-growing segment, dining services has been subtle about incorporating healthful options into morning menus.

“We have been providing a stealth-health program—essentially, we use healthier ingredients, but we’re not labeling them as such—for the last three years,” Toong says. “Providing smaller portions, reducing the amount of sodium in recipes, offering less-sugary beverages, doubling the [servings] of fruits and vegetables—these are some of the positive changes that we have made.”

Good nutrition also is camouflaged in a.m. meals served at schools in Texas’ Houston Independent School District (HISD). Through the schools’ First Class Breakfast program, which delivers morning meals to classrooms, students might start the day with sausage biscuits, but the fluffy biscuits are made from white whole-wheat flour and the sausage patties from low-fat turkey, says Julie Spreckelmeyer, director of communications for Philadelphia-based Aramark’s education division, the district’s foodservice provider. “The best thing about it is the kids are liking it,” she says.

WHAT’S OLD IS NEW

Retro better-for-you breakfast choices are proving to be rising stars for some operators. Hot cereal, for example, is “selling like hotcakes” at UMass, Toong says. The university offers two choices, oatmeal and cream of wheat, available with various toppings. > 25



Healthy Breakfasts, Brighter Students?

Within the Houston Independent School District (HISD), an Aramark account, nearly every student soon will start the day with a healthful breakfast. By September, HISD’s First Class Breakfast program will deliver free breakfasts to more than 130,000 students at 220 district schools, making it the largest in-classroom breakfast plan in the United States.

After a successful pilot program showed improved math and reading test scores at nine schools, Superintendent Terry Grier pushed for expansion. “Not only did the kids enjoy and eat the breakfast when we served it to them in the classroom,” he says, “but their test scores improved, and so did their behavior.”

The breakfasts—yogurt served with blueberry muffins, cinnamon mini pancakes, sausage biscuits with egg, or whole-grain toaster pastries with a banana—are designed to be nonmessy and quick and easy to eat. Baked goods are made from whole grains, and meats are low in fat.

“Most of these kids would skip breakfast if we didn’t serve it,” says Christopher Carnes, principal of HISD’s Herrera Elementary. The meals are free to all students regardless of family income, so there’s no stigma in taking part. In a previous program, served in the cafeteria before school, only 30% of Herrera’s students came to breakfast. Now more than 80% participate.

Goat-Cheese-and-Sun-Dried-Tomato Galettes

Chef-owner Cyril Renaud
Bar Breton, New York City
Yield: 4 servings

Buckwheat crêpes (recipe online)	4
Spinach coulis (recipe follows)	1 cup
Goat-cheese log, sliced in 20 pieces	½ lb.
Sun-dried tomatoes, soaked in water for 30 minutes, sliced	20 strips
Fleur de sel	1 tsp.
Frisée	1 bunch
Watercress	1 bunch
Olive oil	3 tsp.
White-wine vinegar	3 tsp.
Salt and pepper	to taste
Parmesan, shaved	¼ lb.

1. Spread one crêpe on a flat surface or cutting board; spoon ¼ cup spinach coulis on one side. Top with five slices of goat cheese; fold into half-moon shape. Top with five slices of sun-dried tomatoes. Repeat with remaining crêpes.
2. Bake crêpes at 400F until heated through, about three minutes. Remove from oven and place each crêpe on a plate; sprinkle with fleur de sel.
3. In a small bowl, combine the salad greens. To make the dressing, whisk together the olive oil, vinegar, salt and pepper. Toss the greens lightly with dressing; place equal amounts on each crêpe. Garnish with Parmesan.

Spinach Coulis

Yield: about 1 cup

Butter	1 tsp.
Spinach, cleaned, dried	1 lb.
Salt and pepper	to taste

1. Add butter to large sauté pan over medium heat. When it reaches a light-brown color, add spinach; stir until wilted. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
2. Place mixture in blender; purée until very smooth. Transfer coulis to a bowl over ice; chill.

<22 Toong plans to add traditional Asian-style congee (rice porridge) in September.

Guests at Aura Restaurant in Boston's Seaport Hotel also are enthusiastic oat-meal fans, Chef Rachel Klein reports. Aura offers Irish steel-cut oats with brown sugar, apple compote and sweet butter. Popular, too, is another old-fashioned, wholesome breakfast choice: grilled tomatoes. The dish gets an update with sautéed spinach, roasted red peppers, mozzarella and basil pesto and optional hollandaise.

In Cambridge, Mass., upscale-casual restaurant Tory Row is bringing back the grilled grapefruit, a staple of 1950s menus. "Five minutes on the grill completely transforms the typical grapefruit into a complex dish that's bursting with flavor by caramelizing [the grapefruit's] natural sugars," says Abbie Waite, events and communications manager.

DINNER FOR BREAKFAST

Healthy spins on nontraditional breakfast items sell well, too. At West Los Angeles, Calif.-based family-dining chain Good Stuff, one of the top sellers is Cris' Breakfast Salad, a blend of romaine lettuce, black beans, brown rice, tortilla strips and pico de gallo topped with scrambled eggs and ground turkey. "You don't feel stuffed after eating it, so it's great in the morning," says owner Cris Bennett.

One of the most popular breakfasts at New York City's Wall & Water is turkey breast with steamed vegetables, says Executive Chef Maximo Lopez May. "We have a number of people living and working in the area that have very stressful jobs," he says. "They need brain food and healthful food. Starting off the day with vegetables, eggs, toast, turkey breast and olives hits all the major food groups in a tasty, delightful and nutritious way."

Contact writer at riedit@reedbusiness.com



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