

Fowl play: Chicken chain to descend on NY

Pudgie's Famous Chicken targets metro area for 20 stores in the next year and as many as 50 over the next five years; healthier options, including the signature skinless fried chicken, pepper the menu.

By Adrienne Pasquarelli | March 31, 2011 1:00 PM

An entire flock of fried chicken shops is headed for the metro area. Pudgie's Famous Chicken, a brand founded two decades ago in Bethpage, L.I., was re-launched last year under new ownership and is now expanding into the five boroughs big time.

The eatery, now under parent company Trufoods, currently has commitments in place for 20 new franchises scattered throughout Brooklyn and Queens, as well as on Long Island, in the next year. First up, an outpost in Bay Ride, Brooklyn, which is slated to open in late May or early June, according to Gary Occhiogrosso, chief development officer of 4-year-old Trufoods, which is based in Manhattan.

Two more Pudgie's are slated to open in Bay Ridge late this year or early next. Outposts in Elmhurst and Woodside, in Queens, each around 1,000 square feet in size, will launch this summer. The Brooklyn locations will be much larger at 2,400 square feet and are designed to seat up to 30 patrons. All of the new locations will have either a Nathan's Hot Dogs or Arthur Treacher's Fish & Chips as well.

Mr. Occhiogrosso said he also is in negotiations with a potential franchisee who is interested in opening a Pudgie's in Manhattan. Each new franchise costs between \$165,000 and \$260,000 to open, he said.

To re-introduce the brand to New Yorkers, Trufoods has made some adjustments. Pudgie's, despite its weighty name, only offers skinless fried chicken, which is slightly lower in fat and cholesterol. For the chain's return to the metro area, its owners are adding more healthful menu options.

"Folks all over the New York metropolitan area remember Pudgie's fondly," said Mr. Occhiogrosso, who is something of a chicken expert, having launched chicken chain Ranch 1 in the 1990s. "We're now modernizing the menu and addressing consumer needs and trends today in 2011 that didn't exist in 1991." He noted the offerings will now include vegetables such as spinach and salad, as well as grilled—as opposed to fried—chicken options.

One restaurant expert said Pudgie's growth plans are a wise move.

"Fried chicken is back on the front burner of American food," said Clark Wolf, a restaurant consultant, noting that the outer boroughs are a good place to test the market. "Everyone from Thomas Keller and Marcus Samuelson to KFC is re-visiting the classic fried chicken recipe these days."

Long term, Trufoods, which also operates fast-food brands Ritter's Frozen Custard and Wall Street Deli, expects to have some 50 Pudgie's in the New York area within the next five years. Ritter's and Wall Street Deli are also in expansion mode here.



Courtesy of Pudgie's
Pudgie's Famous Chicken is making a run at the New York metro area.