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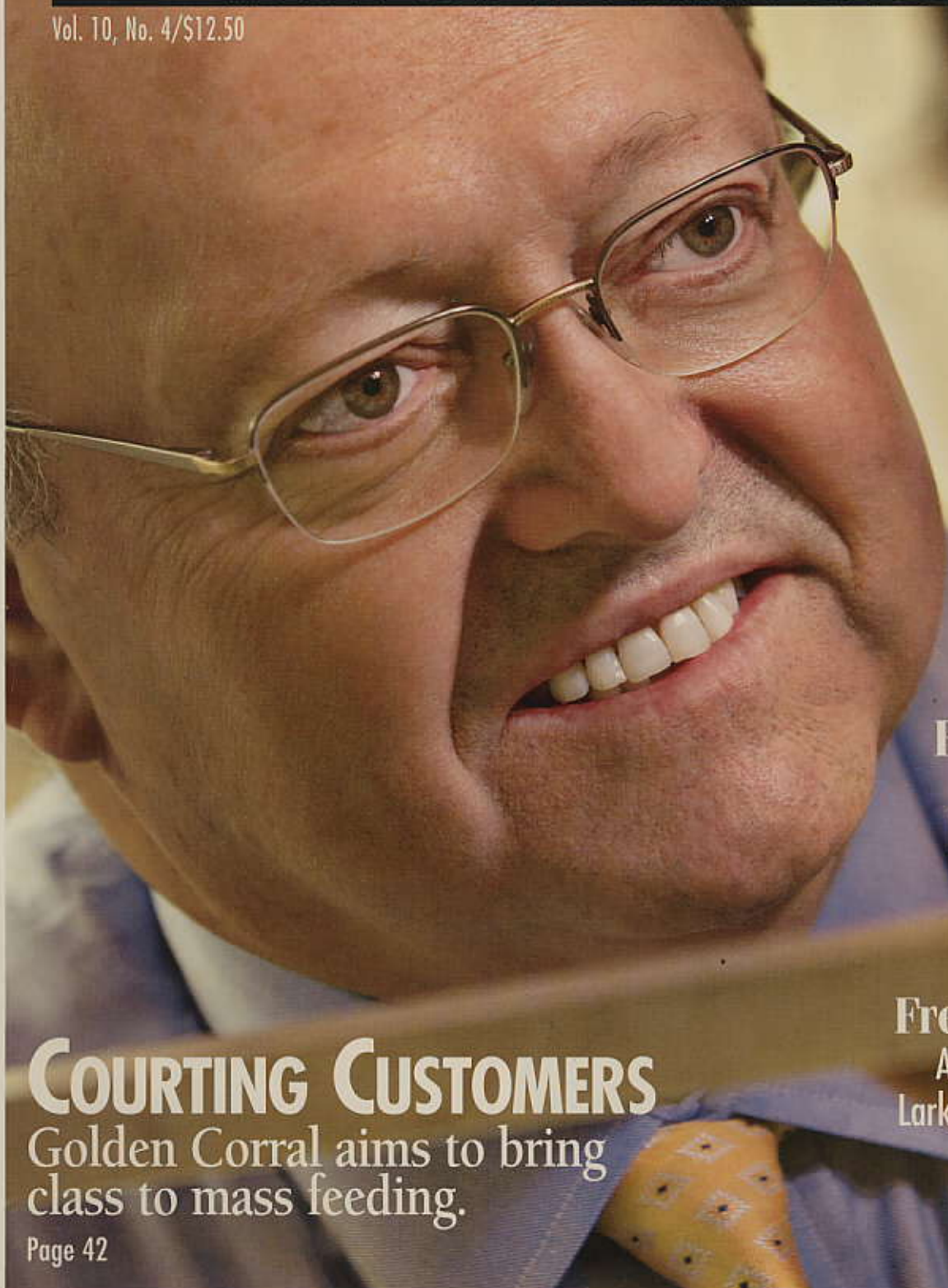
Reed Business
Information

Chain Leader

INSIGHT FOR RESTAURANT EXECUTIVES

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Environmentally Friendly

Fresh City's vibrant new
look matches its menu.

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Fresh Perspective

A systematic approach to
Lark Creek's seasonal focus.

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COURTING CUSTOMERS

Golden Corral aims to bring
class to mass feeding.

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Ted Fowler, CEO,
Golden Corral

MEALS TO GO

Do-it-Yourself Trend Grows in Takeout Meals



Customers at Super Suppers move from station to station, preparing freezer-ready meals from pre-prepped ingredients.

Back in February 2003, Stephanie Firchau and Tina Kuna graced the cover of *Working Mother* magazine for their innovative year-old company, Dream Dinners. The concept allows customers to prepare 12 meals in a few hours, package them in freezer-proof containers and take them home to their families. Staff creates menus, shops for and preps ingredients, and cleans up afterwards.

Since then, there has been a boom in the segment. A search finds no less than 15 multiunit operators and a few more with franchise circulars at the ready. Add the 80-some one-offs, and here is a category worth watching.

The concepts pitch time and money savings, as well as social interaction, to working moms, empty nesters and girls' nights out. Packages vary, but most are just under \$200 for 12 meals serving six. Many of the concepts also offer takeout packages to those who don't want to do the cooking themselves, and some even deliver.

Snohomish, Wash.-based Dream Dinners now has 50 units and 22 more in the works. Fort Worth, Texas-based Super Suppers has 12 and expects 100 to be operating by the end of the year. The company claims it's on track to beat Curves out of *The Guinness Book of World Records* for the fastest growing franchise, projecting another 200 will be sold this year.

Founder of the Culinary School of Fort Worth and Super Suppers, Judie Byrd says Sam Hance, who previously sold Curves' franchises, is leading the franchise-sales team. For her part, Byrd says, "It's blowing my mind." **□**

Multiunit Meal-Prep Concepts	
Chain	Units
Dream Dinners, Snohomish, Wash.	50
Super Suppers, Fort Worth, Texas	12
Dinners Ready, Mukilteo, Wash.	8
Supper Solutions, Westminster, Colo.	8
Let's Dish!, Eden Prairie, Minn.	5
Supper Thyme USA, Omaha, Neb.	5
Meal Makers, St. Peters, Mo.	4
Designed Dinners, Renton, Wash.	4
My Girlfriend's Kitchen, Salt Lake City	3
Dinner and Dish, Littleton, Colo.	2
Dinner Viola, Portland, Ore.	2
Kitchen 2 Kitchen, Tacoma, Wash.	2
Main Dish Kitchen, Holland, Mich.	2
Mix it Up, White Bear, Minn.	2
Village Table, Houston	2

RESEARCH

Not All's Fair in Seating Your Guests

When guests arrive on a Friday night, they expect to be seated "first come, first served." The reality is, the order that customers arrive is not necessarily the order that hosts show them to their tables. But it's important to show guests that you're being fair.

Released last month, a Cornell University report, *Perceived Fairness of Restau-*

rant Waitlist-Management Policies, looked at how customers feel about seating guests according to party size, preferential treatment for VIPs, allowing reservations for large parties only and call-ahead seating. Authors Professor Sheryl Kimes, Ph.D., and doctoral candidate Kelly McGuire found that customers think priority seating for large

parties and those who call ahead is fair, but VIP seating and reservations for large parties are not.

The study found that if policies were clear and well communicated, particularly call-ahead programs and seating by party size, guests wouldn't be as upset by late-comers being seated before them. Respondents said they were more likely to return to

a restaurant if they knew the policies, more so if they could take advantage of them. But witnessing VIP treatment would make them not want to come back.

Recognizing that some customers do require special treatment—regulars and community leaders, for example—the report suggests using a different entrance, keeping them away from the host stand or using a pager system so customers can't easily keep track of their place in line.