

# Fast Casual Executive Summit 2008

Second annual gathering to spotlight economic woes, branding opportunities

In a struggling economy, it sometimes may be difficult for business operators to determine how to balance budget concerns with future goals and innovations. Dealing with rising food and energy costs, as well as consumers' shrinking budgets, requires a delicate and carefully planned strategy.

But many in the industry believe the fast casual space is well prepared to overcome the current economic obstacles.

That theme is expected to resonate with fast-casual concept executives during the second annual, invitation-only Fast Casual Executive Summit, to be held Sept. 15-16 at the Ritz-Carlton in Denver.

"I think the segment is strong because of our attention to the guest," said Ken Clark, chief operations officer of Riverside, Calif.-based Farmer Boys. "Because of that, we're able to deal with the lack of guests' disposable income better than others in the industry."

Echoing that sentiment is Paul Barron, publisher of Fast Casual magazine and chairman of the Fast Casual Executive Summit.

"Some people look at this as an opportunity to grow their business rather than retract," Barron said. "The segment is poised to do very well in an economic downturn."

Clark and Barron, along with an estimated 75 other fast casual executives, will attend four panel-discussion sessions designed to discuss successful initiatives used by other concepts, as well as what's happening in the industry as a whole. The Fast Casual Alliance also will host a private cocktail and dinner party for attendees on the first night of the gathering.

## Branding in the 'sweet spot'

The content at this year's Summit won't just focus on the bottom line. Another hot topic event organizers and executive attendees will explore is branding.

Linda Duke, founder of San Rafael, Calif.-based Duke Marketing, believes the timing couldn't be better for fast casual executives to build their concept's recognition among consumers, in addition to the segment's presence within the industry.

"The fast casual segment is the 'sweet spot' for the current consumer population and economic climate in the U.S.," Duke said. "The segment is a great example of a smarter way to serve the lives of busy professionals and families. Fast casuals provide a great environment and great food at great prices, so the real trick is being the brand that kicks into the fourth or fifth gear with customer service and brand ambassadors."

One aspect of the Summit that will help concept innovators become such ambassadors is the release of the 2009 Fast Casual State of the Industry Report. A discussion of the survey results included in the report will take place during the "Brand Factor" session, which Duke is set to moderate. Event participants will be given a free copy of the 2009 Fast Casual State of the Industry Report as a gift for attending.

"The research results are the most up-to-the-minute information about this particularly popular and growing segment of the restaurant industry," Duke said. "The insights that are gathered by the operators and compared to the survey results in this group setting really drive understanding and better focus for all the brands."



## Strategic exclusivity

The group setting Duke refers to is one that is unique to the Fast Casual Executive Summit. Organizers stress the exclusivity of the conference in an effort to foster energetic networking and unguarded communication and cooperation among participants.

"There are three focuses of this event: To educate, to network and to keep the group intimate so that the sharing and collaboration of ideas is very open," Barron said.

That openness is what sets the Summit apart from other industry events.

"Listening to what other people have done can only benefit me, as well as others in our organization," Clark said.

The agenda for the Summit includes four 90-minute sessions. Sessions include "Brand Factor," "Human Factor," to be moderated by Louis Basille, founder and CEO of Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Wildflower Bread and "Growth Factor," to be moderated by Fast Casual magazine associate publisher Joseph Grove. A keynote address on the "Future Factor," will be given by Janelle Barlow, president of TMI USA and co-author of "A Complaint is a Gift."



Find more information at [fastcasualsummit.com](http://fastcasualsummit.com)



## Schedule of Events



### Monday, Sept. 15

- 12:00-1:30 Opening luncheon and keynote address
- 2:00-3:30 Food Factor session
- 4:00-5:30 Brand Factor session
- 6:30 Infusion private dinner party

### Tuesday, Sept. 16

- 8:00 Continental breakfast and address
- 8:30-10:00 Growth Factor session
- 10:30 -12:00 Human Factor



At **TO-GO** we specialize in Environmentally **FRIENDLY** Packaging. We are **GREEN** !

Call us TOLL FREE at 1-866-795-**TOGO** (8646)  
[info@togopackaging.com](mailto:info@togopackaging.com)