



Celebrity sightings: The famous are much like us, it's the locals you have to watch out for.



Thinking outside the bock: Surly founder has beer dreams on a champagne budget



Culinary scholarships: Toby Tourney's not about how well you play, it's about showing up

FOODSERVICE NEWS

Volume 24 • Issue 7

The News and Information Source for Restaurants and the Foodservice Industry

September 2013

www.foodserviceneeds.net

Barn Meets BLING

By Beth Ewen

THE MAN WHO THINKS every restaurant needs rumbling thunderstorms or roaring dinosaurs has developed two new concepts—Green Acres Event Center and Galaxy Drive-In—which he's preparing to roll out nationwide.

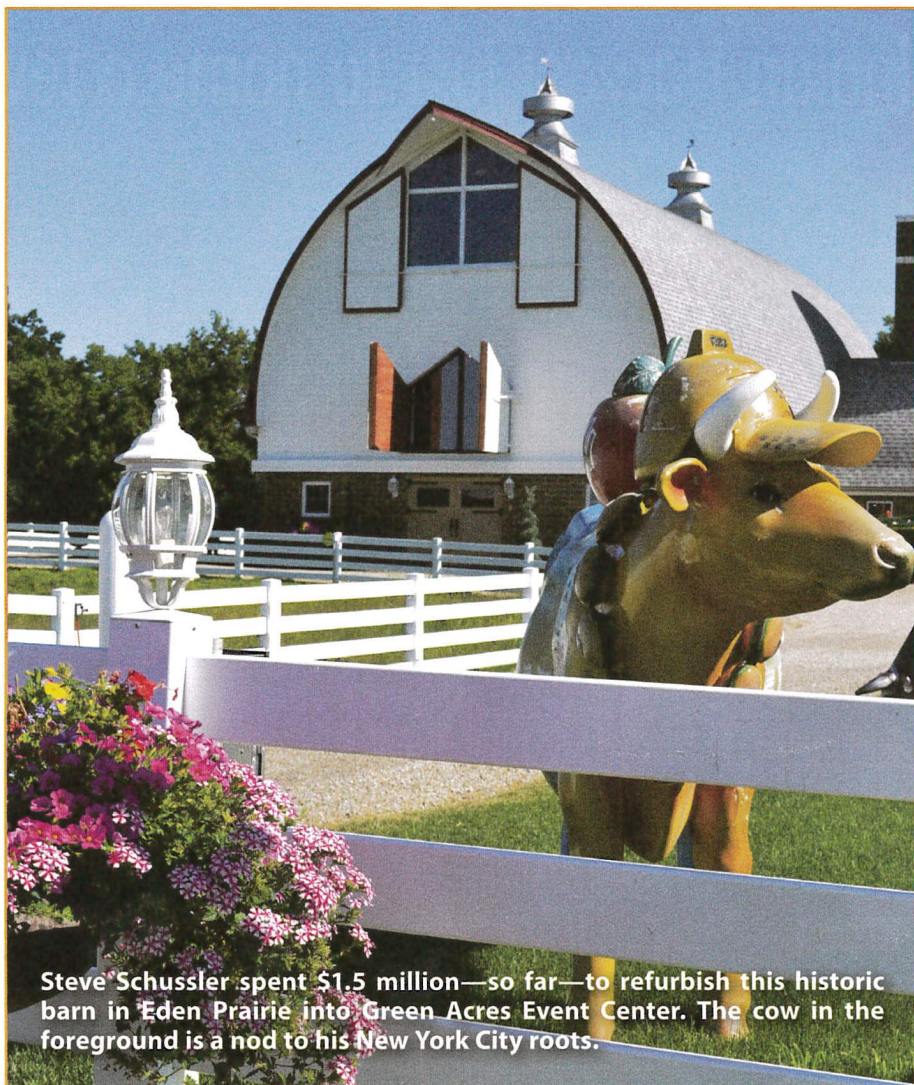
Steve Schussler is the man, so obsessed with creating the Rainforest Café that he spent years tending a tropical jungle complete with exotic birds in his St. Louis Park home. He once endured a police raid when neighbors wondered exactly what he was growing.

"We can't be like everyone else," Schussler says with a giant grin and his perennial tan, seated in a bright red vintage convertible outside his latest venture—a barn, yes, but not the kind familiar to any farm kid. "I love the smell of horse manure," this native New Yorker says, even though there's no such smell here because there are no real animals.

After years and years of trying, Rainforest Café is now owned by Landry's and has 300 locations where the thunder rolls every few minutes under a tropical canopy. At T-Rex, his other national chain that attracted a majority investment from Landry's, animatronic beasts from the Jurassic era spin and snarl.

His two new concepts are distinctive if not so heavily themed, and each has elements that are signature Schussler—like a cigar store Indian that he had rigged to raise and reveal a wine cellar. "I love those James Bond movies with the hidden doors," Schussler says.

The first is Green Acres Event Center, housed in a historic barn in Eden Prairie, which Schussler saved from demolition.



Steve Schussler spent \$1.5 million—so far—to refurbish this historic barn in Eden Prairie into Green Acres Event Center. The cow in the foreground is a nod to his New York City roots.

He wanted the building so badly he kept raising his offer in the sealed-bid process, only to learn that he outbid himself three times. The only bidder, he won it for \$82,000, then spent \$1.5 million—so far—for renovations.

"Barn meets bling is how one bride described it," Schussler says before adding his own characteristically passionate take before starting the tour. "Oh my God. Oh my God. You're gonna die!" A long row of fiberglass cows leads up to the barn, one wearing New York Yankees garb, a nod to Schussler's hometown, another sporting a jacket and tie—an unusual look for a cow.

Barn Meets Bling | page 12

New Menu of Tablet Options

By Laura Michaels

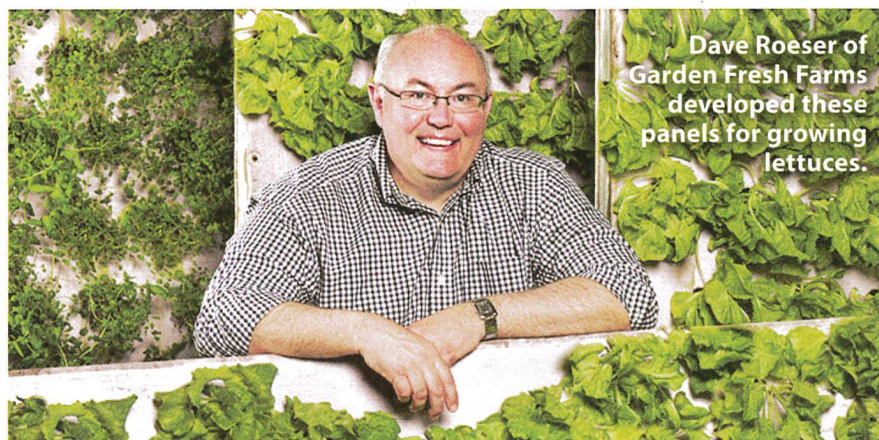
"Restaurateurs are definitely afraid of Yelp."

SO SAYS BILL ZIEGLER, a founding partner of Edina, Minnesota-based The Wirth Group, which brings tablet technologies to the local restaurant scene. Restaurant owners, Ziegler explains, don't want feedback out of their control, and they especially don't want one person's bad review to influence future customers.

Enter Humm, an on-premise feedback application and software system that allows customers to rate services and share comments on a digital tablet presented with the check immediately following their meal. It's just one of several tablet apps aimed to help restaurant owners and managers not only improve the customer experience but also increase revenue.

Customers, Ziegler says, are less likely

New Menu | page 16



Dave Roeser of Garden Fresh Farms developed these panels for growing lettuces.

Is Urban Farming Restaurants' Future?

By Laura Michaels

IT'S FARMING, BUT WITHOUT the tractors and combines. Oh, and it's also done inside, with water instead of soil.

The "it" is urban aquaponics, and this indoor approach to farming is making a home in the Twin Cities, usually in squat, nondescript warehouses or, in the case of Urban Organics, within the abandoned

Hamm's Brewery in east St. Paul. A combination of hydroponics (growing plants indoors, without soil, using drip irrigation) and aquaculture (farm-raised fish), aquaponics aims to be a closed-loop sustainable system, where waste produced by the fish is used to fertilize the plants and the plants in turn filter the water that is returned to the fish tanks.

Restaurants' focus on locally sourced

Is Urban Farming | page 10

*****AUTOMATED DIGIT 55416
MOLLY STEINKE
NEMER FIEGER & ASSOCIATES
6250 EXCELSIOR BLVD
MINNEAPOLIS MN 55416-2799
0004

2808 Anthony Lane South
Minneapolis, MN 55418
www.foodserviceneeds.net

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

PRESORTED STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit #577
St. Cloud, MN

FOODSERVICE NEWS



Paul Dzubnar, left, CEO of Green Mill restaurants, and Steve Schussler, formed a partnership to operate Green Acres Event Center, which features a tractor purchased from the Minnesota State Fair, and Galaxy Drive-In.

He originally bought the barn to store his many vintage motorcycles and cars, and his many statues and props under development by his firm, Schussler Creative, which he calls a “creative laboratory” for restaurant concepts. But then the neighbors started sending him letters, saying those cows made them smile, and thanking him for saving the barn. He decided to refurbish the barn for an event center so the public could use it, for bar mitzvahs or weddings.

He installed enormous chandeliers in the wooden barn, antique jukeboxes, LED lights outside that can flicker red or

green or blue, a John Deere tractor purchased at the Minnesota State Fair—and Paul Dzubnar, CEO of the St. Paul-based Green Mill and Crooked Pint restaurant chains and of Sterling Catering, to provide catering services and run day-to-day operations. Dzubnar’s companies are nearing \$70 million in annual revenue, and Schussler praises him as a first-class operator.

When Schussler learned there are “hundreds and hundreds” of empty barns around the country, he decided to roll out Green Acres nationwide. The idea is to purchase those barns and move them if necessary, then turn them into event centers.

His second concept is Galaxy Drive-In in St. Louis Park, a declining, single restaurant that Schussler saw every day, across the street from his office. He bought it, tricked it out with s’mores pits and more, and started offering free ice cream cones to dogs. After a couple of years of modest success, he again turned to Dzubnar to make the restaurant work.

Dzubnar and his team visited all the diners within driving distance, one time ordering every single item on the menu to test the competition. “We overwhelmed their kitchen, but I learned everything about their food,” he says.

They went door-to-door in the neighborhood, asking what people liked and disliked about the diner. (The answer: they disliked the food and the prices, they liked the ambiance.) Dzubnar and Schussler talk every morning at 8:30, Dzubnar says, one recent day discussing every aspect of their ice cream for almost an hour.

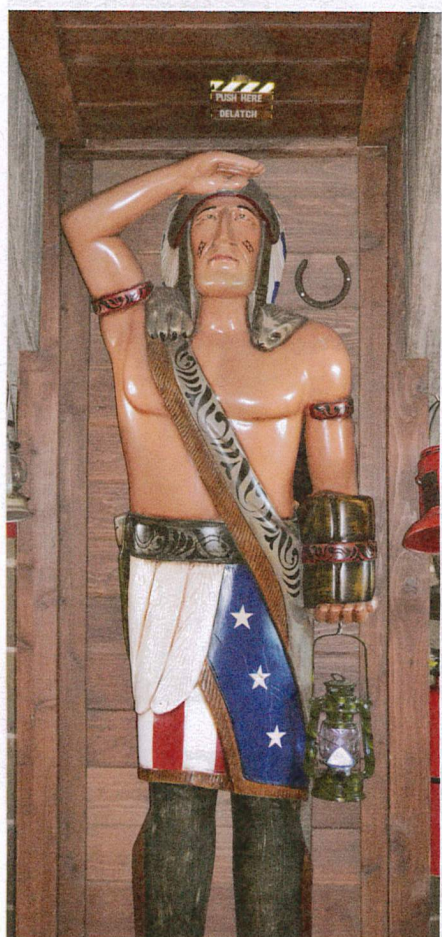
Schussler believes both concepts are ready to take on the road, and his long-time attorney, Doug Holod of Maslon law firm in Minneapolis, is drawing up the documents now in preparation for the expansion to begin this winter.

The concepts themselves are daunt-

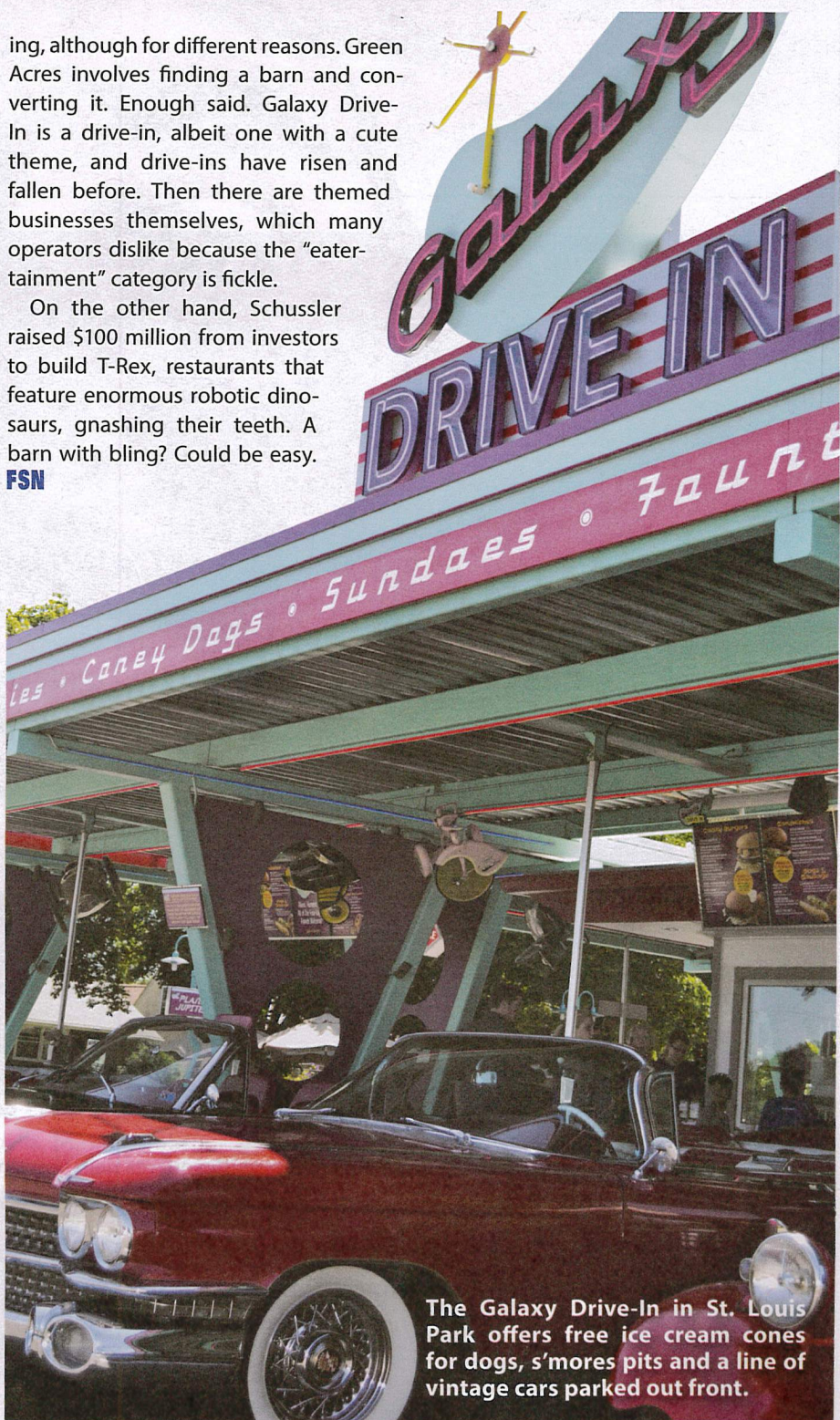
ing, although for different reasons. Green Acres involves finding a barn and converting it. Enough said. Galaxy Drive-In is a drive-in, albeit one with a cute theme, and drive-ins have risen and fallen before. Then there are themed businesses themselves, which many operators dislike because the “eater-tainment” category is fickle.

On the other hand, Schussler raised \$100 million from investors to build T-Rex, restaurants that feature enormous robotic dinosaurs, gnashing their teeth. A barn with bling? Could be easy.

FSN



A cigar-store Indian is rigged to rise and reveal a private wine cellar, inside Green Acres.



The Galaxy Drive-In in St. Louis Park offers free ice cream cones for dogs, s’mores pits and a line of vintage cars parked out front.