

# Spreading The Love

Sherleen Mahoney

The Briad Group's corporate culture strives to create powerful connections for guests and team members

The Briad Group, based in Livingston, N.J., is a fast growing restaurant and hospitality company. It is an owner and operator of restaurants, hotel chains and an outdoor lifestyle shopping center.

It operates 113 Wendy's Old Fashioned Hamburgers restaurants in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania; 57 TGI Friday's franchises in California, Connecticut, Nevada, New Jersey and New York; and owns 15 Zinburger Wine and Burger Bars in Florida, Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina and Virginia. Additionally, it develops and operates Marriott and Hilton hotels and The Promenade Shops at Clifton.

The company's growth plans include building three to five Zinburger and Wendy's restaurants per year.

## Building Briad

Founder, Chairman and Co-CEO Brad Honigfeld started The Briad Group by opening a Steve's Ice Cream/Carnegie Deli in Princeton, N.J., in 1987.

Within a year, the company opened a Roy Rogers restaurant, which was owned by Marriott at the time, in North Brunswick, N.J. The brand was discontinued in 1994 and was replaced with Wendy's Old Fashioned Hamburgers restaurants and shortly after, TGI Friday's restaurants.

"We take pride in operating our Friday's division because of its iconic status and long-lasting relevance in the casual-dining category," said Rick Barbrick, President, Chief Operating Officer and Co-Chief Executive Officer at Briad. "We also have so many managers and teammates who have incredibly long terms of tenure—10, 15, 20 and even folks who have been with the brand for more than 25 years. Due to such a diverse and experienced group of teammates, we have been able to operate our Friday's at the highest level for many years."

To manage costs and project timelines, the company established a construction division in 1993. The division has a successful history of constructing and remodeling company restaurants and hotels on time and within budget.

Briad became a Marriott franchisee in 1997, and five years later, the company added Hilton to the portfolio.

In 2010, the polished casual-dining concept Zinburger Wine and Burger Bar expanded the company's restaurant portfolio, and in 2016 the company took full ownership of the brand.

Zinburger is the company's growth vehicle. Its operating model represents the restaurant industry's future. The Briad Group believes customers, especially millennials, desire boutique brands like Zinburger, and the future of growth lies with brands that offer specialized menus and high-quality, scratch ingredients. As such, Briad is careful about growing Zinburger organically. It doesn't want growth to outpace quality. It's important to maintain the concept as a unique neighborhood restaurant.

"Zinburger, being a relatively new brand, is exciting and challenging to be a part of," Barbrick said. "It will be a permanent fixture in the polished casual-dining environment. Zinburger's food and service is what truly separates us from other burger restaurants and puts us in the whole new category outside of casual dining. One of the most rewarding aspects of being on the Zinburger team, for all of our managers and teammates, is that we get to help build this brand from its infancy to a 300 to 500 restaurant giant."

The Briad Group attributes its success to the strategic selection of the brands for its diverse portfolio, its discerning hiring of talented team members with heart and its corporate culture that includes giving back to the communities it serves.

### A Caring Culture

Briad's culture is defined by the mission statement: "Create positive lifelong emotional connections with our teammates and guests." The company's success hinges on everyone believing in and living the mission every day.

The team-first mentality means it's common for team members from different brands to help each other. Often, this translates to different teams coming together to support marketing opportunities, providing manpower assistance and appearing at corporate functions to support each other.

It also means championing team members' career development and growth. Performance appraisals often create mentoring relationships with managers, allowing team members to discuss strengths and opportunities for improvement to enable growth within the company.

"We create emotional connections every day by giving our teammates and managers the opportunity to grow financially and personally as we do a great job of promoting from within," Barbrick said. "Many of our hourly teammates have become managers, general managers, directors, chefs and even vice presidents."

In the restaurants, the teams create positive lifelong emotional connections by treating guests like friends and welcoming them as if they would to their homes.

"Many of our guests become advocates for the brand, and some even end up being part of the team because of their experiences in our restaurants," Barbrick said.

### Problem Solvers

The facilities team's main priority is to work closely with the operations team, to listen to their issues and obstacles, and create solutions for them. The team is responsible for ensuring timely responses to service requests, completing the work at a fair cost, keeping equipment operational and maintaining a safe environment for guests and employees.

When a restaurant has a facility problem, a general manager submits a work order through Corrigo's system. An in-house technician is dispatched to the site to investigate the issue. The technician determines whether to fix the issue in-house or to call a vendor.

Briad's facilities team includes a facilities manager who handles the day-to-day restaurant service calls and supports after-hour and emergency requests; a director of facilities who oversees all capital and expense budgets, plans and coordinates restaurant remodels and acts as the liaison between operations and facilities to ensure expectations are not only met but surpassed while staying within budget; facilities coordinators who oversee the Corrigo system and manage in-house billing and material procurement; and a regional facilities manager who oversees capital and expense activity on the west coast, sources and qualifies service providers, manages Corrigo work orders, sources new equipment, manages regulatory issues on the west coast, attends meetings with operations, and works with operations to ensure that their issues and obstacles are addressed. With a fiat organizational structure, they report to Dave Cahill, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer.

The department also has 14 in-house technicians who excel at performing all trades and are equipped with the latest technology. Additionally, there is a pool of trusted subcontractors who help support the concepts.

"This team is an important element in our program as it maintains integrity and quality," Barbrick said. "This makes a big difference with the happiness of our teams and consistent quality for our guests."

## Giving Back

Fostering strong community relations is a pillar of Briad's success.

To give back to the communities it serves, the company hosts Benefit Nights and an annual golf tournament.

Created in 2009, Benefit Nights are opportunities for local charities, schools and non-profit community groups to fundraise at restaurants.

The restaurants have dedicated teams that actively search for these opportunities rather than wait for organizations to approach them. And with each new restaurant, the team finds a charity to partner with on opening day.

During a Benefit Night, signage is created to promote the charity, staff is trained to communicate the fundraiser to guests, and volunteers from the organization walk around without being intrusive to thank guests for participating. A portion of the night's proceeds is donated to the organization's cause.

A recent Benefit Night occurred at a new Zinburger in Edison, N.J. Jack Orlowski, the Director of Construction for Field Operations, who had worked for Briad for 21 years, died of cancer shortly before the restaurant opened. The restaurant's opening was dedicated to Orlowski, and the event raised \$10,000 for the American Cancer Society.

The company recently held its 19th annual charity golf tournament at Royce Brook Country Club in Hillsborough Township, N.J. The annual event benefits the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption.

Created in 1999, Briad invites its network of associates, vendors, business partners and community partners to participate in the event. Interested parties can get involved by playing in the golf tournament, sending a monetary donation, donating items for an auction and raffle, purchasing sponsorships and volunteering.

Team members volunteer their time to organize the logistics and day-of-event activities. They run registration, set up the contests, sell raffle tickets and more.

Over 19 years, more than \$4 million has been raised for the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and other various charitable organizations.

### Vying to be the Best

Competition spurs motivation and hones skills.

TGI Friday's hosts an annual World Bartender Championship, where 9,000 bartenders from restaurants across the globe demonstrate their dramatic bottle-flipping moves and drink-making skills. In its 26th year, the bartenders are tested on product, ingredient and recipe knowledge. The world champion receives \$10,000 and a giant wooden propeller.

The Briad Group hosts its own bartender competition, and finalists head to Las Vegas. The Briad winner then heads to the world competition in Dallas for the annual TGI Friday's brand competition.

This year's champion is Lauren Flintham from Limassol, Cyprus. She is the second female in a row to be named TGI Friday's greatest bartender in the world.

"It is an honor to be named the World's Greatest Bartender," Flintham said in a press release. "I'm proud to represent my town, come back to my local Friday's as the World Bartender Champion and display this legendary propeller over my bar!"

The event also raises funds for charitable organizations. This year, \$30,000 was raised for Feeding America, a hunger relief organization with a nationwide network of food banks.

The Briad Group's Friday's Culinary Championships was inspired by the World Bartender Championship. They thought, since there is a center of excellence for bartenders, why not have one for the chefs?

This competition fosters culinary excellence with teams competing at the restaurant level and by region. Teams include four chefs (one from each kitchen) and kitchen managers. They are tested on recipe adherence, knowledge, creating and serving picture perfect food. The winning team is crowned the "culinary best of the best."

Each year, more than 230 chefs and 60 kitchen managers take part in the annual competition. The winners from the first round move on to semi-final events, where 36 west coast teams compete for "Best in the West" and 23 east coast teams compete for "Best in the East" titles. The final showdown occurs in Las Vegas, where east and west compete for the "Best Culinary Team in the Briad family" title.

Zinburger also joined the fun in 2016 with its Culinary and Hospitality Championships.

In the Culinary Championship, team members are challenged to create recipes that could ultimately be part of a concept menu. Chefs build their teams who compete at the restaurant level. The winners then move on to the regionals and finals. One competitor from each location competes against the other winners within their regions. Then, there are two regional competitions in the first quarter followed by a final competition in the fourth quarter.

Last year's winner was Noah Querques from Morris Plains, N.J., who is now a sous chef in the restaurant.

The Hospitality Championship is for front-of-the-house team members who compete for the title of "Best of the Best in Zinburger Standards." The competition tests brand standards, guest experience, brand knowledge, application of standards, wine presentation, cocktail service and overall service adherence. Competitors are judged on their interaction with guests and how they create emotional connections. Winners at the restaurant level then move on to a regional competition, culminating in a final "Brand Super Bowl" competition.

"Both championship programs are designed to create excitement and friendly competition that reward best practices, and to ensure optimum quality from our food and beverage programming exactly as it should be delivered to all of our guests," Barbrick said.

### Genuine Connections

The Briad Group strives to create welcoming environments for guests to enjoy great food and experience genuine connections with team members. That's what they believe the restaurant business is meant to be.

Sherleen Mahoney is a staff writer for Facilitator magazine.