

Get ready to pound the pasta


By Missy Frederick



If you're not already experiencing meatball hangover since the opening of New York-based Italian restaurant Carmine's in August, take note: The latest Italian concept from the BLT Restaurants group is shooting for a September opening of its D.C. location.

Casa Nonna is slated to open at 1250 Connecticut Ave. NW in Dupont Circle (Top Shelf announced the lease signing last November). The restaurant, where California Pizza Kitchen used to be, is BLT's first original Italian concept and one of three BLT ventures in the District. BLT Steak opened in 2007, and **Go Burger** is on the way to Dupont Circle later this year.

People who enjoy the large portions of Carmine's will feel at home. The restaurant will feature family-style dishes, as well as a la carte offerings. Chef **Amy Brandwein**, who used to cook at **Fyve** in The Ritz-Carlton in Arlington (and worked under **Roberto Donna**), will head up the restaurant, which will serve both Roman and Tuscan fare, including pizza, fish entrees and house-made pastas. Pasta inhalers won't have to skimp on the portions: Pasta dishes will be available in quarter-pound, half-pound and full-pound servings.

 New York-based health-oriented restaurant **Energy Kitchen** has been stalking D.C. since March in the hopes of opening a franchise. It's now one step closer to doing so.

The company has signed **Karen Woolard Finley** to open three locations in the Washington market. She is targeting downtown D.C. for her first location and also looking at Georgetown and Chevy Chase, though no deals are signed.


Woolard Finley came across the chain when she and her husband were living in New York part time and she was on the hunt for a healthy lunch option in the financial district. All of Energy Kitchen's offerings – whether wraps, salads or soups – are 500 calories or less.

"I didn't have to try and make it fit my life-

style," Woolard Finley says. "It was already my lifestyle."

This will be her first foray into franchising. She declined to discuss financial specifics, but research company Franchise Mall estimates it costs at least \$750,000 to open an Energy Kitchen, including a \$30,000 franchise fee. Most stores average 1,200 square feet.

Energy Kitchen currently has six corporate stores, three franchise locations and one under construction.

 Some say luxury retail is dead, but don't tell that to Tysons Galleria.

The high-end mall has recently signed a flurry of shmantzy retailers to add to its portfolio.


Gucci opened in August. **Anne Fontaine** opened a new concept store (concept: we're more than just white shirts) in July. Clothing retailer **Michael Kors** is under construction, and designer **Elie Tahari** has signed a lease to open a store next year.

Tysons Galleria has been seeing a comeback in luxury retail, according to General Manager Rich Dinning. In June, sales at the mall were up overall about 15 percent from last year.

Anne Fontaine, meanwhile, has seen the recession as a time to take advantage of real estate deals for expansion.

"The bright side of things is that there are opportunities to look at new markets," says **Christina Ramirez**, marketing coordinator for the chain. "A lot of other retailers have halted or put plans on hold; we've moved forward."

Anne Fontaine, which has 27 stores internationally, has four of its new concept stores in Asia, but this will be the first in the U.S.

 Bagel chain **Einstein Bros. Bagels** is about to get some competition. From itself.

Einstein Noah Restaurant Group Inc. is planning to expand its **Manhattan Bagel** chain in the Washington area. The chain will open upward of 14 locations in the area in the next couple of years, according to a company spokeswoman.

The brand isn't new to the market: There are four Manhattan Bagels around here, and more than 20 Einstein Brothers in the Washington area. Bring on the bagels.

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