

Charlie Brown's to Expand To 79 Restaurants By 2007

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written For The Westfield Leader and The Times

WOODBIDGE – Mountainside-based Charlie Brown's Steakhouses plan to expand to 79 restaurants across four states by the end of 2007. Chairman of the Board of Charlie Brown's Acquisition Corporation Russell D'Anton said during a meeting of the New Jersey Chapter of the Association for Corporate Growth (ACG) on September 20 at the Woodbridge Hilton. The company currently operates 59 restaurants, including 48 Charlie Brown's units.

The company, which was purchased by New York-based Trimaran Capital Partners earlier this year from Castle Harlan, Inc. for \$140 million, also operates nine The Office Restaurant Beer Bar & Grills and two Jolly Trolley restaurants, including one in Westfield, the oldest restaurant in the company.

Charlie Brown's restaurants are located in New Jersey (including Scotch Plains, Union and Millburn), New York State and Pennsylvania. The company plans to expand into Delaware.

Mr. D'Anton said Castle Harlan wanted Charlie Brown's management team to operate and expand the company outside of New Jersey in new markets. The company grew from 30 to 45 restaurants under Castle, who purchased the company for \$50 million in 1997 from Restaurant Associates.

"It was an exciting time (under Castle Harlan)," Mr. D'Anton said. "We demonstrated we could successfully open restaurants outside of our market," including restaurants on Long Island and the company's first restaurant in Pennsylvania. Restaurant Associates owned the company from 1974, when it had six restaurants, to 1997. By 1987, the number of restaurants had expanded to 25.

Company sales have risen from \$45 million in 1994 to a projected \$155 million by the end of this year. Charlie Brown's looks to eclipse \$180 million in sales next year and \$230 million by 2007, Mr. D'Anton said. Charlie Brown's plans to open nine restaurants this year and 10 establishments in 2006. Among the new locations coming are Toms River, Raritan and Jackson, N.J.; and Lancaster, Reading and Harrisburg, Pa. The company has units in Scranton and Williamsport.

"My biggest challenge is not to outgrow our capability," he said. "But I feel strongly that our management team is set up to do certainly nine or 10 (new) restaurants a year for the next couple of years."

"We are the largest casual dining company in the State of New Jersey," said Mr. D'Anton, noting that Charlie Brown's stiffest competition comes from the Outback Steakhouse chain.

He said the company looks for existing restaurants, especially mom and pop operations, when eyeing future Charlie Brown's units. Mr. D'Anton said the company leases all of its restaurants.

"We look to be opportunistic – to take over existing facilities," he explained.

In terms of The Office restaurants, he said the company opens those units from time to time when expansion possibilities are too close to existing Charlie Brown's restaurants.

Charlie Brown's frequent dining club, The Handshake Club, boasts over 750 members. The company employs almost 5,000 people and has one of the lowest turnover rates of any restaurant company, Mr. D'Anton said.

Management turnover is less than 15 percent and employee turnover is less than 65 percent, including seasonal help, which Mr. D'Anton said is a good number for the restaurant industry.

The company uses free-standing inserts – which periodically are included in *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* – as a primary source of advertising. The company uses the advertising pieces to promote new entrées not on the regular menu.

Mr. D'Anton has been with Charlie Brown's since 1976, when he began as a 16-year-old working as a dishwasher. He started his managerial career as an assistant manager at the Old Tappan and Chatham restaurants. After holding numerous management positions, he was promoted to president and chief operating officer in 1997, responsible for Charlie Brown's and Office concepts.

Westfield resident and current ACG-New Jersey President Mark Kuehn founded the ACG chapter two years ago. Karen Stone, also of Westfield, is the chapter president. She said meetings are held the third Tuesday of the month, excluding July and August.

"ACG is one of my first loves," Mr. Kuehn said.

More than 100 members attend meetings to learn about corporate growth, development and mergers and acquisitions for mid-size to large companies. Ms. Stone noted that financial institutions, especially banks, are well represented at monthly meetings.

The national organization was founded in 1954.



Fred K. Lecomte for *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*
"SUNSHINE KIDS" RECEIVE SUPPORT...Westfield Prudential NJ Properties Broker-Manager Marjorie Cuccaro, left, Ellen Murphy, Westfield NJ Properties Sales Associate, center and Tracy Crane, Scotch Plains-Fanwood YMCA Associate Aquatic Director, right, joined forces to help children with cancer by raising funds in their first "Swim for the Cause."

Sunshine Kids Effort Generates Outpouring of Support for Cancer

By FRED LECOMTE
Specially Written For The Leader and The Times

Prudential New Jersey Properties, based in Westfield, along with the Fanwood-Scotch Plains YMCA, stepped up their joint effort to help children with cancer by raising funds in a "Swim for the Cause" on Sept. 25 at the Fanwood Scotch Plains YMCA. More than 150 swimmers took the plunge for this worthy cause.

Established in 1982, "The Sunshine Kids" is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping children with cancer. The organization is committed to providing positive group activities and emotional support for young cancer patients. The "Sunshine Kids" program provides a variety of programs and events free of charge for children who are receiving cancer treatments in hospitals across America.

Ellen Murphy, sales associate of the Westfield Prudential Office explained, "Each individual Prudential Office conducts a fundraiser for the Sunshine kids annually. I contacted Tracy Crane, the the YMCA Associate Aquatic Director and asked if we could conduct the, 'Swim for the Cause' event."

Murphy added, "Crane presented it to her associates who widely accepted it. We then prepared a united committee; spread the word to all of our offices, while Crane presented

the event to the members of her swim team. The turnout is wonderful with most of the members and adults participating. We have members of our other offices bringing kids from different swim teams with them along with adults and coaches."

Mr. Crane said, "We will have the majority of our swim team participating in the event throughout the day. The kids receive a pledge form, which they collect from different sponsors. They bring them in and collect either a flat donation or they can get a per lap donation, which most people choose. We have volunteer lap counters who count the laps," she said.

When asked what the average number of laps was, Crane said, "We have swimmers coming in here doing anywhere from 50 to 100 laps or more so they can raise a lot of money." Marjorie Cuccaro, broker-manager of the Westfield Prudential NJ Properties office added, The Sunshine Kids is the foundation that Prudential decided on a number of years ago. Our office really embraced the idea of this. This is our first participation in this wonderful cause.

"All of our agents are participating by raising funds and making it a fun event for a cause that will do a lot of good for many children," she added.

THE STUDENT VIEW

The weekly column written by local high school students

WHS Runner Examines The Cross-Country Culture

By NEIL FITZPATRICK
Specially Written For The Westfield Leader and The Times

"There is no glory in cross-country." Last year, as a freshman on the Westfield cross-country team, that was the first thing I was told by an upperclassman. He was right, of course, even if he was half joking. At the time it was both thoroughly disappointing and slightly confusing. Why then, was he on the team, and for that matter, why was I?

These are questions that come up frequently for most runners, whether it is in the middle of an eight-mile practice or on the starting line of a race. Why did I choose to participate in a sport most athletes would consider a punishment? As my teammate mentioned, it was obviously not for the glory. No matter how well the team does in one particular season, it will never be as popular or covered as much as say, football. Why then, do we run?

Everyone has his or her own personal motives. Many people do it to stay in shape, others because it looks good for college, and some simply because they love the sport. While everyone's individual reasons may differ, there is one that the vast majority of runners share. That is the culture of the team itself.

Scoring in cross-country is based on the places of the first five people on a team to cross the finish line. A team's score is determined by adding up the places of these first five, with a lower number being better. Consequently, a perfect team score in a meet would be fifteen, with the top five runners from a team claiming spots one through five. In this way, meets are won and lost based on each individual's performance. All the runners run their own race, and whether they have a good day or bad day, they alone are responsible.

This has an enormous impact on team culture in that it attracts a certain type of person to the sport. The only way to succeed in distance run-

ning is hard work. That means consistently forcing yourself to run longer and harder than you have before. As with most things in life, to do this requires a certain degree of mental toughness and work ethic (ask your grandpa about that one). As a result of this, most runners are at once independent and have strong or eccentric personalities.

That being said, practice would be ineffective without the team. Every member pushes and is pushed by the others, so you have no choice but to keep up. If a team member is struggling, encouragement is offered immediately, not because it is a particularly sensitive group but because everyone has been in a similar position before. The idea is that if you can run as a group in practice, you can run as a group in a race.

Oddly enough, these people who take the sport so seriously feel the same way about very little else. The entire team is dominated by a laid-back sense of humor consisting of constant taunting – that is, making fun of "your mom" in the nicest way possible. Everyone shares a certain competitiveness, but even this is less intense than it sounds. For the most part it is played out on ancient video games, rock-paper-scissors tournaments and intense games involving dice.

There may be no glory in cross-country, but who needs it when you are the undisputed champion of rock-paper-scissors? Everyone has different reasons as to why they chose to run. However, a few weeks on the team is all that is needed to know why, despite the pain, no one would ever quit.

Neil is a sophomore at WHS.

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Paul J. Peyton for *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times*
ANNOUNCING EXPANSION PLANS...Russell D'Anton, Chairman of the Board of Charlie Brown's Acquisition Corp., left, accepts a plaque from Mark Kuehn of Westfield, President of the New Jersey Chapter of Association for Corporate Growth (ACG), following Mr. D'Anton's address to the ACG on September 20. Mr. D'Anton announced that the company is planning to expand to 79 restaurants by the end of 2007.



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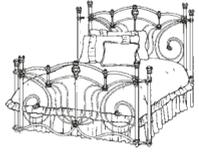
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