



Concentrics Restaurants

After redefining Atlanta's dining scene with bold, boundary-testing concepts, Robert Amick's group and its sister company target new urban markets

■ **BY JACK HAYES**

Peers who knew Robert Amick before he became managing partner of Concentrics Restaurants and Concentrics Hospitality Solutions in Atlanta would not call him a one-of-a-kind concept developer.

They'd remember Amick as operations vice president for Atlanta-based Peasant Restaurants after it was taken public — when he headed the growth of the casual-theme Mick's concept, which became a chain with more than 20 units in cities like Nashville, Tenn., Minneapolis, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.

"Cloning restaurants is part of my history," Amick says. "But today I don't want to be rubber-stamping anything for economic gain. Doing 20 of the same thing just isn't what we want anymore."

Indeed, Concentrics Restaurants is a group on a mission. Launched in fall 2002 with the explosive debut of ONE, midtown kitchen, an upscale American brasserie in Atlanta, the organization has grown into a multibrand restaurant company as well as a management and consulting business with combined systemwide gross revenues of \$30 million.

Amick's first boss, Stephan Nygren, who pioneered upscale-casual dining in Atlanta when he co-founded Peasant Restaurants more than 30 years ago, hired Amick in 1974 to tend bar at the group's second restaurant, called Peasant Uptown.

During more than two decades at Peasant, Amick moved quickly into its management program, becoming a unit

manager, a regional manager and eventually a partner and vice president over all operations.

"Bob was never content to stay with the status quo," Nygren says. "He's always been ready to push the cutting edge. And with the city maturing as a restaurant market, his new concepts are being embraced."

Amick says his success lies in accommodating guests.

"We're in the 'yes' business — giving people reasons to dine with us rather than going elsewhere," Amick explains. "We're doing it with great views and lighting, open kitchens, innovative chefs, menus and wine service, and energetic dining spaces."

Other units in the Concentrics Restaurants group are TWO, urban licks, a dynamic brasserie that serves wine from stainless steel barrels, and pie bar, a modern, upscale pizza concept that also offers Mediterranean microplates and martinis.

Sister company Concentrics Hospitality Solutions has consulting and management deals with three additional restaurants. Two of these, which had strong openings in 2005, are Lobby at TWELVE, a contemporary hotel brasserie, and Luma on Park, another chef-driven contemporary brasserie, in Winter Park, Fla. The management group also contracts with Murphy's, a midscale concept that was converted to an urban bistro in Atlanta's Virginia-Highland neighborhood.

"What's great about working with the Concentrics group is their imagination and flexibility," says Marc Weinberg, a partner in Atlanta-based The Shopping Center Group LLC, whose mission is finding expansion properties for Concentrics. "They understand their market and their customers beautifully, and they create concepts that people want to drive to."

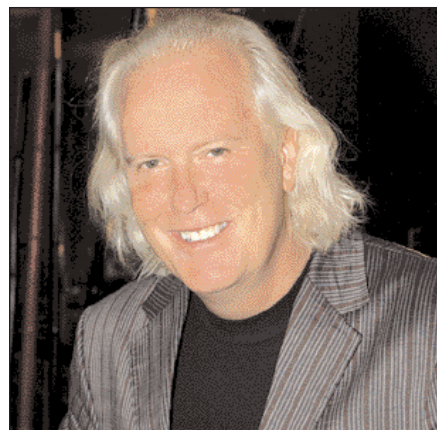
With few exceptions, industry peers and local reviewers have praised the group's output. But, as is true with any operation, customers are driving the success of the Concentrics group in midtown Atlanta and now in central Florida.

Opened in October 2004, the second Concentrics concept, TWO, urban licks, eclipsed its sister restaurant ONE, midtown kitchen by generating \$7.5 million in revenue last year on dinner only.

"We think TWO is the busiest dining room in the city now," Amick boasts. "We opened the first Saturday night of the new year with 900 reservations."

Built in a former warehouse, the 300-seat TWO integrates a "nonstructured" menu of bold, regionally influenced foods, a dramatic mid-dining room exhibition

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Robert Amick, above, is managing partner of Concentrics Restaurants as well as Concentrics Hospitality Solutions, which has consulting and management deals with Luma on Park, top, in Winter Park, Fla., and Murphy's, left, in Atlanta.

MULTICONCEPT GROWTH COMPANIES

Concentrics Restaurants

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kitchen set off by a giant wood-fired rotisserie and converted 19th century forge, and a warm industrial ambiance with glass-walled views of downtown Atlanta — all accented by live blues music.

"Food has always been critical, but good food isn't enough," Amick says. "It's the ability to create a concept that whets

exclusively to urban markets, says Amick, who only wants to expand "where culture is living, working and playing."

Having spent more than \$2 million to convert the space where TWO was launched, Amick credits its success to longtime operating partner Todd Rushing and executive chef Scott Serpas. Rushing is responsible for overcoming a year of

Still, Amick acknowledges the role of marketing and human resources, overseen by administrative and marketing partner Mary Reynolds, a former human resources vice president with the Peasant group.

Reynolds, who was also human resources vice president with Dave & Buster's in the mid-1990s and a Carrabba's Italian Grill joint-venture partner for the Georgia region, began providing public relations and marketing for ONE. midtown kitchen and continues in that role for all Concentrics restaurants. It was the launch of Concentrics Hospitality Solutions that got Reynolds involved as a "top-of-house" partner, looking at synergies between the company's concepts.

"Murphy's is dramatically increasing revenue and profitability with us," Reynolds says. "It's a 25-year-old operation that needed not only the advantage of co-marketing with other restaurants but also partnering on HR benefits. One of the strategies behind CHS was to corral economies like these for clients."

Meanwhile, the Concentrics group also recently centralized all accounting functions when it hired Kevin Burke as chief financial officer late last year.

Amick says food cost across the Concentrics portfolio ranges from 29 percent to 32 percent depending on the concept, while fully loaded labor cost, including management benefits, varies from 24 percent to 26 percent.

"Everybody likes these combined numbers to be at or below 60 percent, but for us the real measure of profit is when net earnings are adjusted to exclude interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization [EBITDA] hits 20 per-

cent," he explains.

Per-person check averages at the group's restaurants begin at \$16 for pie bar and vary from \$35 to \$39 at the other Atlanta units, with TWO. urban licks at the upper end, as noted, according to Amick. But Trois, when it opens, will become the new high end with an average check in the upper \$40s. Tap meanwhile is targeting a low-\$30 check average. Luma's average is in the low \$40s. "I'm not a believer in the \$75-a-head dining segment," says Amick. "We want to be accessible — to give a high-quality hospitality experience for half that amount. Yet accessibility isn't just about price. It has a lot to do with attitude."

Concentrics finalized two successful deals in 2005 that will continue to bring the group high visibility. One was the launch of Luma on Park in partnership with NASCAR chairman and chief executive Brian France.

Amick recalls that Luma's debut, in

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Concentrics Restaurants and Concentrics Hospitality Solutions

HEADQUARTERS: Atlanta

YEAR FOUNDED: 2002

NUMBER OF UNITS: 6

CONCEPTS: ONE. midtown kitchen, upscale casual; TWO. urban licks, upscale casual; pie bar, upscale casual; Luma on Park, upscale casual; Lobby at TWELVE, upscale casual; Murphy's, upscale casual

ANNUAL SALES: \$30 million

WHERE IT TRADES: Florida, Georgia

NEW MARKET TARGETS: Austin, Texas; Baltimore; Charlotte, N.C.; Nashville, Tenn.; Phoenix; Tampa, Fla.

TOP EXECUTIVES: Robert Amick, managing partner; Todd Rushing, operating partner; Mary Reynolds, human resources and marketing partner; Kevin Burke, chief financial officer

WEBSITES:

www.onemidtownkitchen.com

www.twourbanlicks.com

www.piebar.com

www.lumaonpark.com

www.lobbyattwelve.com

www.murphysvh.com



ONE. midtown kitchen, right, and TWO. urban licks, above, both in Atlanta, are two of Concentrics Restaurants' three concepts. TWO. urban licks, which earned \$7.5 million in revenue last year on dinner alone, is the group's highest-grossing concept.

the appetite, tantalizes the senses and breathes with terrific energy." According to Amick, the entertainment value of dining is larger than life today.

Meanwhile, there are at least two more restaurants on the Concentrics expansion docket this year, both set to open in the 1180 Peachtree building overlooking Woodruff Arts Center at the crossroads of midtown Atlanta.

The first of the two, Trois, will be a high-grossing modern French brasserie on three floors, including a sophisticated ground-level bar, and a 200-seat main dining room and 175-seat private event room on levels two and three. And Tap, a gastropub smaller than Trois, will be a neighborhood operation with a large patio facing Peachtree Street. About \$5 million already has been spent on Trois' debut, scheduled for late spring.

"With these new units, we'll add \$13 [million] to \$15 million in revenue," Amick says. "We're projecting that Trois alone will be an \$8 [million] to \$10 million operation. That's what we want to do — keep developing busy restaurants."

Yet concepts of this type are suited

hurdles that opened the way for the one-of-a-kind, "barrel-stored" wine program at TWO. In fact, Rushing gets credit for the entire group's successful and highly profitable 60-40 food-to-beverage ratio. Wine revenue alone at TWO last year reached \$2.7 million.

"We've gotten into the habit of looking at things differently," explains Rushing, a former Peasant Restaurants general manager who eventually led that group's unit opening team. "Selling wine from barrels isn't traditional, but it's still the same juice that comes out of the bottle. It's just a matter of changing how you see the world."

It's no surprise that Rushing and Amick share a dim view of organizational structure.

"We don't want to reinforce a corporate culture," Amick says. "Each concept should be driven by its team. This means I'm not a big believer in corporate chefs either. We want to have very unique chef-driven restaurants."