

John Rorer Discusses Vision for Richard's Foodporium

Editor's Note: Richard's has been in existence since Richard Downey founded the company in 1979. John Rorer purchased the chain with two partners in 1997. In 2005, John bought out his partners and is now sole owner. There are 11 stores in Southwest Florida, with Sarasota as their central location. They have recently renamed the company from Richard's Whole Foods to Richards Foodporium. Visit www.richardswholefoods.com.

John, what can you share about your expansion plans?

We should be ready to launch as a franchisor as of early August. We've chosen this avenue of expansion because it allows us to share expansion costs with franchisees and also retains local ownership, since each franchisee serves its own community.

What else can you share about your vision over the next several years?

We'll carefully launch as a franchisor, ensuring that we first work out any initial issues and have several happy, successful franchisees that can be our testimonials moving forward. We're first opening the areas around the greater Sarasota area, including Fort Myers, Orlando, Tampa, etc. As we build out sufficiently in Central Florida, we'll then open on the East Coast, then the Southeast States, and so on. We'll be reluctant to expand outside of this progressive model unless we're able to find highly qualified area developers in other states, which would allow us to justify the initial costs and logistics of servicing franchisees in distant areas.

What are some of the issues and challenges presented by your franchise development plan?

We are now almost two years into the franchising process. No matter how many stores or what experience one may have, franchising is essentially an entirely new business model. Besides all of the legalities to hurdle, one of the biggest challenges has been to document virtually every single step we take at every single level of our retail operations into what are called Standard Operating Procedure Manuals. Creating these manuals forced us to take a hard look at our current operations and to do a tremendous amount of improvements while gaining greater consistency among our present stores.

In addition to those manuals, there are things such as the build-out process for franchisees, establishing costs, training programs, marketing materials, integrating all of the suppliers, point of sale, creating plan-o-grams, etc. It can be a little overwhelming at times, but it's a very healthy process.

A lot of businesses are holding tight or even cutting back in 2009. What went into your decision-making process to sell franchises beginning this year?

This is something I'd envisioned and have been working on prior to the recent economic environment. I realized we could either wait out the economic recovery and then start the development process, or we could start now and be ready once the economy recovered. We'd always have the option to push back or slow plans. I further realized that this could be an excellent time to franchise, as our business model, and grocery in general, is somewhat recession resistant.

What do you regard as the core selling points of owning a Richard's franchise?

Primarily, I'd say this is what I call "right livelihood." It's a business and investment that one can feel good about owning and operating. You're helping people live healthier lives. Natural foods



and healthier lifestyles aren't simply trends; they are part of a fundamental change in American shopping and eating habits. Everyone has to eat, and those who have made a decision to eat and live healthier usually don't abandon that decision. Buying a Richard's Foodporium franchise offers a multitude of advantages, such as operational systems, extensive training, a strong management team, build-out support, supplier relationships, a proven track record and business model, our central warehouse and purchasing abilities, and much more. I'd be remiss not to point out to any aspiring business owner that we've made the mistakes for you and can minimize your risk. Being a Richard's franchisee, one can enjoy the benefits of owning a business without many of the risks usually involved.

Who are some of the key individuals involved with your expansion?

We couldn't have done any of this without our management team as well as every single one of our store managers and employees. All of them have contributed to helping Richard's become the successful family it is today. And it really is like a family. I could name multiple individuals, but one key person I have to mention would be Kevin Lowe, our franchise director. He will be the front man on our development as a franchisor. With a combined experience of almost 150 years, every director we have, from finance and operations to marketing, data management, and purchasing, will be heavily involved in our expansion. Every store and employee in our family will be ambassadors of the brand.

Your expansion plan suggests optimism about our economy and the future of our nation. What is the basis of your positive outlook?

I'm a generally positive person and believe that I largely control my own destiny. I know that no matter what happens in life, I have the ability to independently lift myself up and be successful again. As for the current economic situation, I've lived through numerous recessions, one of which was possibly worse than this one. I passionately believe that America is a beacon of liberty and opportunity, the greatest place on earth to live, and that Americans, including myself and the Richard's team, are capable of overcoming anything placed before us. **PC**