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### [House of 'Yumm!' \(<http://www.registerguard.com/csp/cms/sites/web/news/sevendays/24684713-35/yumm-café-beauchamps-customers-gerdes.csp>\)](http://www.registerguard.com/csp/cms/sites/web/news/sevendays/24684713-35/yumm-café-beauchamps-customers-gerdes.csp)

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Rice and beans, however humble, form a healthy, affordable protein meal for millions of people in South America, the Caribbean and the Middle East.

This idea wasn't lost on Mark and Mary Ann Beauchamp, founders of the Eugene-based Café Yumm! franchise.

When the Beauchamps opened their first Café Yumm! restaurant in 1997 at the Fifth Street Public Market, they operated on the premise that people would gladly dine on a simple meal of rice and beans in a casual setting.

The couple learned rather quickly that plenty of customers were more than happy to pay a little more for organic fast food, even if it meant placing their own orders at a counter.

Their formula — a reasonably priced, “fast casual,” wholesome food eatery — worked.

Ed Gerdes, Café Yumm! vice president and general counsel, says the Beauchamps' business concept naturally meshed with the local consumer trend toward healthier eating of organic products.

When served together, rice and beans are a complete protein, says Gerdes, who has been involved with the Beauchamps' business almost from the beginning. “The quality of the food is high, and everything is organic,” except the olives, which are not available as an organic product.

The Beauchamps gradually expanded their menu, paying attention to what customers suggested, Gerdes says. Quite simply, the Beauchamps “created dishes people liked.”

Oakway Center's Café Yumm! franchise, owned by the Beauchamps, opened in 2002. Its design allows customers to enter the cheery, contemporary eatery inside the mall, as well as from the parking lot.

Like other Café Yumm! restaurants, dining at Oakway's Café Yumm! is a participatory experience. Customers order at the counter and pick up their own flatware and water as they find an empty table.

And it's fast. Customers barely settle at their table before one of the counter staff delivers a steaming bowl of hearty beans and rice, or a tangy chicken skewer.

Even though Café Yumm! does not have wait staff, they still recruit kitchen and counter staff

carefully. Gerdes says they hire people “who are happy to serve the food,” and who share values that are compatible with the company’s mission and vision: “To serve beautiful, delicious, healthful, high-quality, soul-satisfying, deeply nourishing food.”

The rice and bean bowls are popular with vegetarians and meat-eaters alike, says Gerdes, who oversees the legal, marketing, public relations, warehouse and human resources functions of the company.

Available in small, medium and large sizes, each bowl includes a topping of cheese, sour cream, olives and fresh cilantro, avocado and tomato. Most have a dollop of the special Café Yumm! sauce that Mary Ann Beauchamp developed.

Among the several specialty items on the menu are wraps filled with tempeh or tofu, and skewers of chicken — all natural, and baked. A rotating menu of soups generally features beans and other legumes. Several choices of sandwiches and salads, made with organic produce, round out the menu. Customers who have a hankering for something sweet can select from three Yumm!-based cookies: ginger spice and oatmeal raisin, which are wheat-free, and chocolate chip that’s made with whole-wheat flour.

These days, Cafe Yumm! operates within an expanded sustainable business model that includes manufacturing and distributing Yumm!-branded sauces and dressings, and selling franchises of Cafe Yumm! restaurants under Beau Delicious! International, LLC, the franchisor of Cafe Yumm! Restaurants.

Café Yumm! now has 10 restaurants. Eugene has four, Springfield has two, Portland has two and Bend and Corvallis each have one. The Beauchamps own three of the nine franchise-owned stores, including Oakway’s Café Yumm!

In 2009, Inc. magazine’s 500/5,000 list reported that Café Yumm! is the 27th fastest-growing restaurant/beverage company in the United States. The same year, Portland Business Journal honored Café Yumm! as ninth on its list of fastest-growing privately held companies in Oregon.

Gerdes notes that Café Yumm! is one of the few Oregon-based restaurant franchises.

But even from the beginning, Café Yumm! had a track record of food so deeply nourishing and soul satisfying, and served in record time, that customers never seemed to mind bussing their own tables.

They just kept coming back for more.

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