

ROAD FOOD ON A DIET

How one man's struggle with weight launched a revolution in healthier speed eating —
ANDREW MENGEL

Unless you live in the Philly area, you may not have heard of Bryn+Dane's Healthy Fast Food, yet. But the fast-food restaurant that focuses on offering healthy snacks and meals is poised to change the way people snag a quick meal on the road. Worried about his own weight and frustrated that he couldn't easily find quick healthy food to make losing pounds easier, Bryn Davis opened a boardwalk snack shack selling popcorn and smoothies five years ago. Today, four Bryn+Dane's restaurant locations provide dozens of healthful meals and snacks to Philadelphians, and the startup is planning a 100-store expansion with franchise expansion team Fransmart. We spoke with Davis to learn about what his concept's success may mean for the future of fast food.

ETNT: How did this whole Bryn and Dane's thing start?

My whole life I've gone up and down in weight pretty drastically. When I attended La Salle University, instead of putting on the freshman 15, I put on the freshman 75. I went to the doctor and he said I needed a lifestyle change or the consequences could be grave. It scared me straight! I became serious about weight loss and when I started to try and eat healthy, every place that was convenient to eat was impossibly unhealthy. I was in college and I decided: let's make it as easy as possible for people to eat healthy by recreating the fast food model. Let's take what is working in fast food and infuse healthy options. We are not USR. We are not fast casual. We are fast food.

ETNT: What did Bryn and Dane's originally look like?

We started off just smoothies and popcorn in a small, little shack on the Ocean City boardwalk. After, we opened our first free-standing drive through. Since then we've added the other two locations on and brought in some investors that are pretty active and have made a lot of great things happen.

ETNT: Where are your locations in Philadelphia and where are you expanding to?

We have three now but two opening by this summer, that'll be a total of five. With some new partnerships, we are now opening up 100 units in the next five years. They'll be concentrated in the North East, but within those five years they'll span both coasts.

Could you talk about the origins of your ingredients?

We call our foods local-low-cal. First, we try to source it locally. If we can't get it locally, we put a lot of care into who we partner with to make sure we're getting quality home-grown food. But regardless of where it comes from we construct our recipes so it's low-calorie. We want to appeal to the people using the ingredients from Whole Foods; please the Weight Watchers participant who needs a healthy meal and assist the busy parent, who needs a quick, healthy choice for their kids. You can find all of that at Bryn and Dane's.

ETNT: So how are you guys different than, let's say Panera Bread, who prides themselves as "healthy" fast food?

First of all everything on our menu is under 500 calories, our smoothies under 300. You can't find that at Panera Bread. Even our soft drinks are healthy. We don't offer the ten-tap Coca-Cola machine; we have a 12 tap system, with all organic iced teas that we brew and put on tap. We brew and make everything onsite. The things you consider to be healthy, we've made healthy. Our Chicken Strips are gluten free and baked not fried. Our wraps, salads, sandwiches, entrees, and soups are all packed with healthy ingredients that will make you full and energized all day.

ETNT: Besides the expansion across the country, what's next for Bryn and Dane's?

We're leaving for Africa in a couple days, where we're opening a small Bryn and Danes in Entebbe, Uganda. With the community, we're going to build a store, giving the city another local resource. I want to develop a big brother-little brother dynamic with our locations. We're excited to see how the Entebbe location works out. If it's successful hopefully we'll expand the program.