



Salad Creations

Healthy, fresh, affordable and fast.
Pam Wilk Brings Healthy Eating to the Strand

by Keith Waller

It's easy to think it impossible to find a quick and inexpensive meal along the Strand – fast food style that's actually healthy, that is – with the two thousand calorie burger, fry and shake meal available on every corner. Some of those fast food joints stock a bland pre-made lettuce salad, some even offer low-fat dressing with it, while others go upscale with café style coffee and microwave pie. But really, is that good enough?

With only marketing to acknowledge the food pyramid, few fast-food establishments even try to accommodate a vegetarian or vegan request or satisfy any weight-watching plan. The famous Jared is the only spokesman who isn't a cartoon character or clown, and, to his credit, has transformed himself to slim, fit and healthy with fast-food dieting. Journalist Eric Schlosser (*Fast Food Nation*) was not as lucky with his fast-food eating plan.

Pam Wilk prefers the term "quick-serve restaurant" to "fast-food." While low cost and fast, Salad Creations stands legions apart from typical fast food, and may represent the future of fast food. Here, fresh vegetables, fruits

and healthy selections go into the custom-created, chef-made salads that represent the bulk of the menu. Nothing is fried or barbecued at Salad Creations, and while there is "sweet tea" and "not-sweet tea," both are organic, as are the juices. Chips are baked and trans fat-free, dressings come non-fat. Raw foodists, vegans and meat eaters can eat together in peaceful co-existence.

Situated in the shopping center at 4440 Ocean Hwy 17 Bypass, in Murrells Inlet, Salad Creations has the bright and colorful look of many quick-serve restaurants. On closer inspection, it is images of fruits and vegetables on the walls, just like in the produce section of the supermarket, dominated by the salad prep line where you're greeted immediately as you enter. There is a menu, and you can order a pre-

planned salad recipe or build your own from the selection of salad items. There are daily specials, too, and you can choose your salad in a wrap or a bowl, chopped or tossed. Freshly made panini sandwiches are coming soon, made especially with their new free-range chicken. "We just started the 'chef specials,'" says Pam. "We had a spicy buffalo shrimp wrap instead of chicken, and it sold out before noon, which was great. These specials give people a little more variety."

Though Salad Creations is a franchise and the menu cannot be changed substantially, it is evolving, adding more and more organic and natural ingredients and options. Even so, Pam says that she can offer suggestions to the Salad Creations marketing experts. "Having the chicken added was a big thing, but the new organic tea was a total surprise," she laughs.

Where does the continuous supply of fresh greens and produce come from? "We use A&A Produce locally, and Salad Creations has special contracts with Taylor Farm products," Pam Replies. "Salad Creations negotiates our supply based on quality, to keep it fresh and still affordable." Regardless of the efforts of the headquarters, Pam looks at every bag, scrutinizing it for freshness. "Absolutely any sign of discoloration and I reject it."

Not every salad topping is necessarily crunchy green or vegetable, however. The toppings list is long enough to put you in "choice paralysis" if you don't choose the suggested recipes. If you're a carnivore, there is much to satisfy. In addition to free-range chicken, there is shrimp, sliced beef and Alaskan wild salmon. Not farm-raised and dyed pink salmon, mind you, but the most expensive, top quality salmon, made affordable by the franchise's buying power. Dieters recognize salmon as super nutritious, high in omega-3 fats and quality protein. "The beef is deli sliced beef, and isn't organic. Not everything is—yet," explains Pam. Salad Creations

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provides deserts, and while Pam isn't thrilled about it, she is required to offer big, chunky Otis Spunkmeyer cookies—if you have a craving they'll be there, taunting you.

Salad Creations attracts a broad range of customers, including a number of people looking for good food that fits in with special dietary requirements and health concerns. "A lot of people come in looking to eat healthier, and some, just love salads and pile it on," says Pam. "We have had a couple of customers who have lost massive amounts weight. One guy lost sixty pounds in six months, eating here three days a week and sticking to the healthiest salads. A lot of Weight Watcher people come in, too, and one of the instructors recommends it in her classes.

"I have a nutritional statement for every salad recipe, including its calorie content," Pam continues. One loyal



Pam Wilk

customer even put together a list of point values for Weight Watchers®, which Pam makes available to people following that plan. "Any allergies, like wheat or soy—we have that info, too. We're not nut free or a peanut free facility, since we have peanut dressing, tree nuts and such, but each salad item bin has its own utensil for the chef, so different items aren't shared or touching."

Recognized as "the" healthy menu

for office catering on the Strand from Georgetown to North Myrtle Beach, Pam often provides catered lunches to doctor's offices and wellness centers. Catering makes it possible for Salad Creations to be more flexible with the menu, offering special sugar-free deserts or other specialty items instead of cookies, along with the mainstay salads and wraps.

Pam was purposefully pursuing a business venture in nutrition when she chose Salad Creations. "I was a dental hygienist for 15 years and became interested in nutrition because of its effects on dental health. That was the beginning of my interest, then my husband developed colon cancer at

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44. I did some research, thinking that there had to be something we could do nutritionally to support his colon cancer fight. I looked at digestive health, did a lot more reading, and we started eating healthy as a family, organic and everything. My kids only said, "Why can't I have the foods all my friends are having?"

My husband survived the first round, but then it came back—liver, lungs, stomach. In Houston, we did tests and trials, and I started cooking strictly organic. We did natural shakes every morning and worked on nutrition. He didn't lose his hair and he ran the Peachtree Road Race while he had cancer." Eventually, Pam's husband lost his battle with cancer at age 47. "I wish I had known as much the first time as I did the second," says Pam. "With this background in organic cooking and natural foods, I looked for something more natural when I wanted to go into business, something that would support health in the community."

Pam has three kids, and two of them help out at Salad Creations. "My youngest son [that] works here," she says. "He's still in school, and is into natural gardening and herbs and organic stuff, so one out of the three is converted," she quips. "He's actually looking into raising cattle naturally, and thinking about moving to Wyoming." Maybe he'll choose somewhere nearby instead.

Salad Creations is at 4440 Hwy 17 Bypass in the shopping center near Piggly Wiggly. Now open Sundays and available for call in orders, pick-up and catering. Call (843) 651-2292 or order online from the online menu at SaladCreations.net. See ad page 2.