

SPRING 2015

FOODBIZ.CA



SOLUTIONS • BRANDS • IDEAS

**also inside ▶**

Chefs give back  
Flirt with sweets  
Untamed cuisine

# Head OF THE CULINARY CLASS

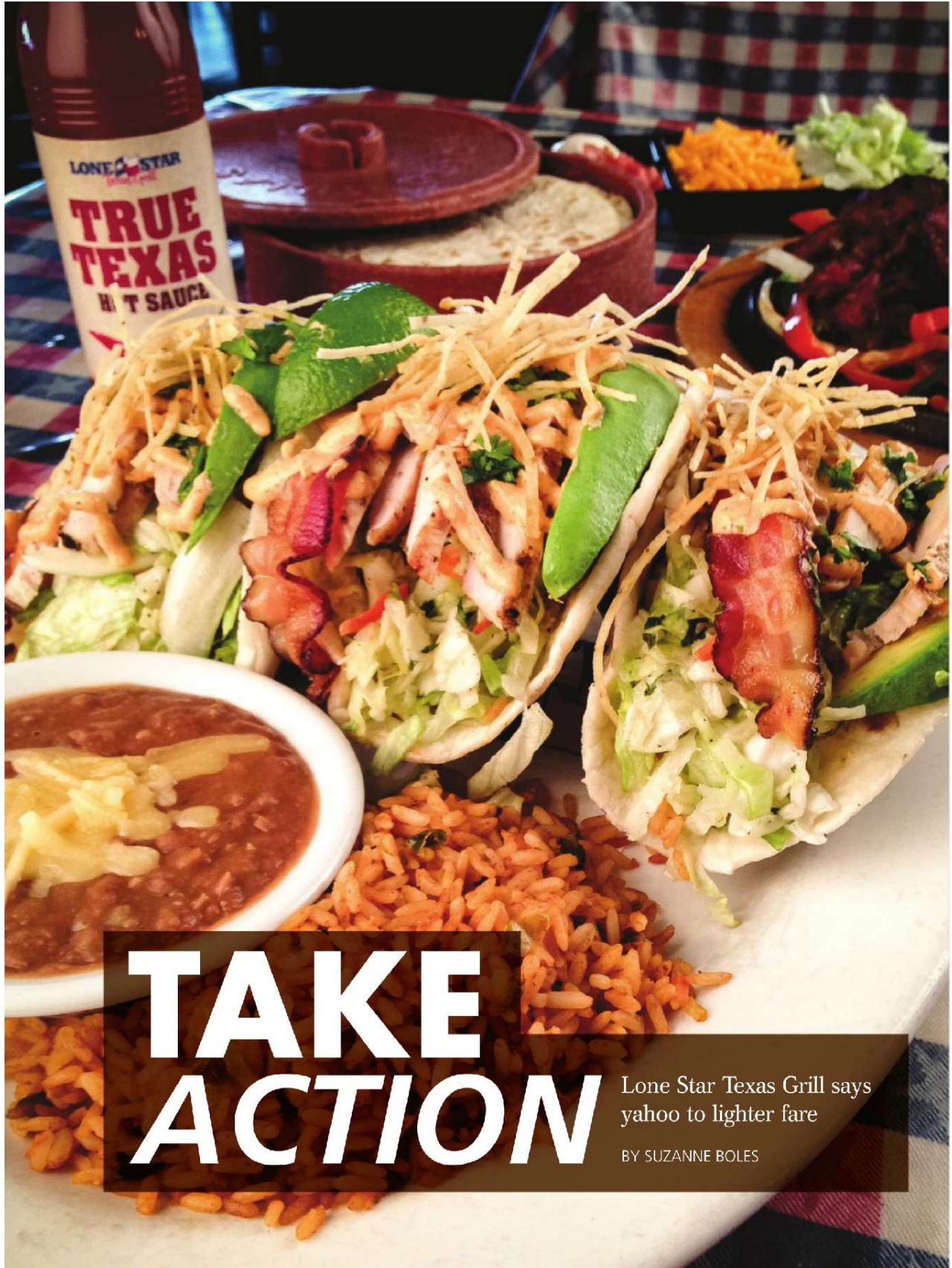
BRANDS AND COLLEGES  
FORGE TASTY RELATIONSHIPS

Madhura Lakra, chef,  
Humber College student, ON.

PM42840023 \$12.00



[ CLOSE UP ]



# TAKE ACTION

Lone Star Texas Grill says yahoo to lighter fare

BY SUZANNE BOLES

BRANDON GRAY





**Respect guest feedback.** Don't remove popular items from the menu, but find ways to introduce fresher, lighter fare, too.

**Know your market dynamics.** For instance, you can't really find local tomatoes in April, so you need to understand when you can actually purchase seasonal spring items when you're factoring in a new spring menu.

**Don't sacrifice your signature dishes** for all-new offerings. Yes, diners are probably interested in lighter fare in the spring, but they're also looking for their tried-and-true choices, plus those small indulgences, like desserts.

**Lyndon O'Hearn is sprucing up his menu with warmer weather fare now that spring is showing the first signs of life.**

But the Lone Star Texas Grill corporate chef, who oversees menu choices and procurement for the company's restaurants, says changing up the menu doesn't mean a complete redesign. Sometimes it's just a matter of adding some lighter choices and ensuring diner favourites still enjoy top billing.

Lone Star is a proudly Canadian chain, established in 1986 by two Texans who moved to Ottawa and brought with them the idea that a Tex-Mex restaurant would liven up the local dining scene.

When it comes to tweaking his menus, O'Hearn uses terms like "reviewing," "updating," and "consistency." He emphasizes that listening to feedback from staff and customers is vital.

"Eight out of ten times, most people who come into a restaurant they're familiar with know what they're coming for.

**"We may just target five key items, adding some lighter, fresher flavours."**

You don't want to disappoint them," he says.

"We're constantly reviewing and updating our menu. With 20 [Ontario-based] stores, it's more about consistency

in our brand than a single standalone unit, where you have more flexibility. When we're making menu changes, they're not wholesale changes. We may just target five key items, adding some lighter, fresher flavours. And that's also ongoing, not just spring-specific."

Spring, for O'Hearn, means incorporating more seasonal produce, for example replacing squash with spring carrots and soups with salad features, but always retaining the freshness he says is key to the success of the Lone Star brand.

Signature dishes remain menu staples. For example, Lone Star is famous for the mesquite wood-grilled meals, popular in both winter and during BBQ season.

And while French fries are a perennial favourite, O'Hearn recommends replacing the heavier garlic mashed potatoes with a side salad when the weather warms up.

Ground beef tacos are still on the menu in spring, but they may be joined by salmon tacos, too, with fresh seasonal fillings like avocado, cilantro, tomato, and onion.

Fajitas represent a significant percentage of Lone Star's sales, but spring is the opportunity for the lighter "skinny" fajita: artisan romaine centres (boats) to place around the fajita mix offerings like skillet seared red and green pepper, onions, condiments, tomatillo salsa, and guacamole, along with mesquite-grilled chicken breast and shrimp. O'Hearn notes, "It's light and it's filling, definitely a plus for the menu." **yfm**