

Franchise Times®

Deals for Brass Tap, Juice it Up!

BY DAVID FARKAS



Beer here

Now meet London-born Vik Patel, a former mortgage broker who became a Dunkin' Donuts franchisee in 2006 and has since developed or acquired 22 stores, the bulk of them in the Tampa, Florida, market. A typical entrepreneur, he keeps an eye out for opportunity.

Beer—craft beer, to be specific—popped up on his radar. “I am a beer drinker at heart,” says the London-born operator. “I’ve always liked good beer.”

But merely loving quality suds isn’t enough to run a successful bar business. You better figure out if there’s a demand for a liquid product that commands \$6 to \$8 per glass. It so happens there is in Tampa.

For the last two years, Patel has been noticing craft beers in Tampa-area restaurants. Figuring there was now something of a mass market for better brewskis, he signed a 10-store agreement for Brass Tap, an upscale pub chain launched in Florida in 2007. In 2012, Tampa-based FSC Franchise Co. (also the franchise arm of the Beef O-Brady’s chain) began franchising the 21-unit concept.

Brass Tap is known for more than 300 rotating craft beers on tap, live music and cigars (puffed on the outdoor patio). Yet the modern bar-food menu—including quesadillas, fish-and-chips, paninis—sealed the deal for Patel, who also considered a similar franchise that featured menus from nearby restaurants instead of its own food. “I thought having food was critical,” he says.

The operator also liked what he heard from Brass Tap franchisees who shared their financials. “They were very accommodating. You will always find out more from franchisees than from franchisors,” he recalls, hastening to add he liked everyone he met at corporate, too.

Patel opened his first and so far only unit in April, in Oldsmar, Florida. He’s preparing to open three or four more by year end; leases have already been signed for those units. Patel is tapping an SBA lender to finance the build-outs.

Craft beer is on the upswing, by the way. The Brewers Association, which promotes craft beer makers, claims 99 percent of the 3,040 U.S. breweries are small and independent. “The majority of Americans live within 10 miles of a local brewery, and with almost 2,000 planning breweries” in its database, that percentage “is only going to climb in the coming years,” its website boasts.

Good news for Brass Tap, because franchisees make an effort to pour locally made craft beer. “We give up a good percentage of our taps to local breweries,” Patel says, adding that Florida suds currently foam from 30 taps in his bar.

Taking the trouble to do so won praise from a Yelp reviewer who noted shortly after Patel’s Brass Tap opened: “What we witnessed was a great mix of local and out-of-state craft beers, as well as a great selection of imports.”

David Farkas has covered the restaurant industry for 25 years as a reporter and food writer. Submit your company’s development agreements to him at dfarkas99@gmail.com.