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Star  Bulletin .com

Vol. 11, Issue 117 - Thursday, April 27, 2006



TheBuzz

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Hawaii-inspired beverages to quench thirsts in N.Y.

BALLPARK FOOD has been more than just hot dogs and beer or soda for years, but Hawaii coffees and Hawaii-inspired smoothies are now joining the other "exotic" foods at Shea Stadium in Flushing, N.Y.

A franchisee of Denver-based Maui Wowi Hawaiian Coffees and Smoothies will serve gourmet hot chocolate and tropical fruit smoothies, with or without alcohol at the New York landmark.

Two Maui Wowi stations will serve beverages on different levels of the stadium behind home plate -- on the field and the mezzanine levels.

Franchisees Paul and Joanne Branca were previously in the printing and advertising businesses, but after 12 years, decided to become their own bosses, as well as their own clients, they said in a statement.

"We are excited to be part of the Maui Wowi Hawaiian 'ohana' and to bring a little bit of Hawaii to New York," Paul Branca said.

Shea is the first major league baseball stadium to add a Maui Wowi concession, though there are franchises at minor league parks and other venues around the country.

The Maui Wowi Web site lists only one Hawaii location, at the Arizona Memorial Park at Pearl Harbor.

But back to New York City.

Maui Wowi will be one of the few nonfat choices at the New York Mets' not-long-for-this-world home (it's due to be replaced in 2009, according to the Mets' Web site).

According to Jim Robins, a writer for Web site ballparkwatch.com, typical tube-steak fare at Shea includes corn dogs, hot dogs and foot-longs ranging from \$3 to \$5.75.

However, a range of other cuisine is available, as one might expect in cosmopolitan New York -- Italian pizza and deli sandwiches, Jewish food like knishes, Cuban sandwiches, even sushi.

Maui Wowi first gained popularity as an alternative to deep-fried or otherwise fatty carnival fare at, well, carnivals and fairs in Utah, before it got into the franchising business.

The Brancas also plan to take their smoothies and Hawaii coffees on the road, to fairs and festivals throughout New York.