

BUSINESS

RETAILING

New franchise in town

Maui Wowi Hawaiian Coffees & Smoothies is trying to gain a foothold in the area. **PAGE D2**



COMING THURSDAY

■ Traders will be reacting to comments by oil ministers gathering in Caracas, Venezuela, for the OPEC meeting.

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D2 HOUSTON CHRONICLE **

ON TWO

Wednesday, May 31, 2006

Moneymakers

FIVE QUESTIONS
WITH SANDY TYLER

Coffee and smoothie concept wows franchisees

It's not easy competing with retail giants like Smoothie King and Starbucks, but Maui Wowi Hawaiian Coffees & Smoothies has created a niche by taking on both.

Maui Wowi, founded in 1983 by Jeff and Jill Summerhays, has been franchising since 1999. The privately held Greenwood Village, Colo.-based retailer sells Hawaiian Kona-blend coffees and fresh fruit smoothies.

Maui Wowi is a rapidly growing franchise with 359 locations in 41 states. Franchise units come in all sizes: standard stores, smaller drive-through models, kiosks and trailers for special events.

Houstonians Sandy Tyler and her husband, John Tyler, are Maui



BILLY SMITH II / CHRONICLE

SANDY TYLER: "My husband and I researched a number of franchises and liked Maui Wowi because we liked the coffee and smoothie concept, and the company gives you the feeling that you'll get all the help you need."

Wowi's area directors for the region, which includes

Houston, San Antonio and Austin.

Two stores have opened in the Houston area. Laura

Haney opened the first Maui Wowi in Katy a year ago, and two weeks ago Denise McCaskill opened one in partnership with the Tylers in the FM 1960 area.

Three more shops are opening soon: two in the Katy area, each inside new H-E-B stores, and another in the Heights.

Houston Chronicle reporter David Kaplan talked to Sandy Tyler about Maui Wowi and what it's like to be a pioneer in the Houston area.

Q: How do you differentiate yourself from competitors such as Starbucks and Smoothie King?

A: At Maui Wowi, you can get coffee and/or a smoothie at the same location.

We also focus on the healthy aspect.

Our smoothies are made with fruit puree with no additives, fresh bananas and 20 percent nonfat cultured yogurt.

Q: How did you become part of the Maui Wowi franchising operation?

A: My husband and I researched a number of franchises and liked Maui Wowi because we liked the coffee and smoothie concept, and the company gives you the feeling that you'll get all the help you need.

It's not like your big corporate take on franchises. It's wasn't like you bought into it and were left alone.

They make sure you're a good fit before you're granted a franchise, and they have different size units to suit everybody.

It costs a total of about \$75,000 to open a kiosk version of the business and about \$200,000 for a store.

Q: When you're a new brand in town like Maui Wowi, is it more likely for the pioneer franchisees to communicate with each other and give each other support?

A: Definitely. We all have our own business interests, but we interact. We're all out to help each other.

Denise and Laura share ideas and do events together, like swim meets and fundraisers. They set

up kiosks together.

Q: Who is your target customer?

A: I'd say people 10 to 20, middle school and high school.

Kids love them. We have a young, athletic, health-conscious customer base. A good location can be around a high school or soccer field, malls or sports arenas.

Q: Is it just a coincidence that the first Houston owners of Maui Wowi are women, or does the franchise have a particular appeal to them?

A: In some instances it's because they have kids and like that our smoothies are a healthy alternative. It's a good feeling about the product. You believe in it.

Laura and Denise have both been in the corporate world, and this is more fun. You get a smile out of people when you say "Aloha" when they walk in the store. And it's a pretty drink. We put a parasol in every smoothie.

david.kaplan@chron.com