



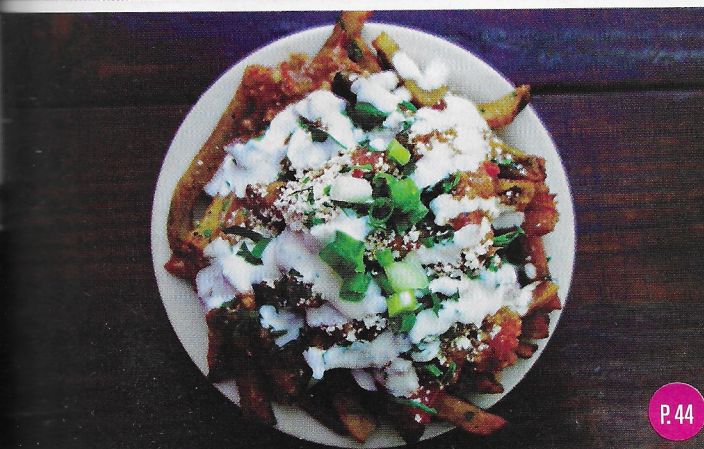
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THE REGIONAL POWERHOUSE GROUPS

12 multiconcept operators that dominate in one corner of the world

THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO DREAM of opening restaurants around the world. And there are people who want to stay focused on home.

Across the country, there are growing multiconcept groups populating their cities or greater metropolitan areas with independent restaurants that stand out. These are groups that may not be national names, but in their own respective necks of the woods, they run restaurants locals know and love.

They are the regional powerhouses of dining.

Some are close to growing beyond their home borders, while others are very deliberately staying within their regional wheelhouse. There are advantages to being a pillar of the local dining scene and truly understanding the needs and desires of a community, they say.

“The community takes you more seriously if you make more than one restaurant commitment,” said Jason Berry, co-founder and principal of Knead Hospitality + Design in Washington, D.C. “They see you digging in and not just opening one restaurant in D.C. that you’re never going to visit. You see the media focusing much more on who’s legitimately interested in being a part of a community and who’s a fly-by-night trying to suck out a few bucks.”

Strategies differ somewhat, but these regional operators agree: There is a huge benefit to having all concepts within easy driving distance. Living on planes isn’t fun, and being there is half the battle in the daily quest for well-run restaurants.

So take a look at these 12 restaurant groups dominating markets from San Diego to Long Island. Because sometimes there really is no place like home.





Table 301 founder Carl Sobocinski.



Table 301 runs several restaurants, along with catering and a food truck, all in Sobocinski's adopted hometown of Greenville.

Table 301 Restaurant Group: A dining cornerstone of Greenville, S.C.

LEADERSHIP Carl Sobocinski, president and founder

HQ Greenville, S.C.

SYSTEMWIDE SALES \$20 million

CONCEPTS Soby's, The Lazy Goat, Nose Dive, Passerelle, Southern Pressed Juicery, Highway 301 food truck, Jianna, Table 301 Catering & Kitchen

Carl Sobocinski is originally from New Hampshire, but he came to South Carolina to study architecture at Clemson University and you could say he found his forever home. He opened Soby's New South Cuisine in 1997 in what was then not much of a downtown at all. But Sobocinski was putting a stake in the ground in a city with potential.

"It was a property I could afford in a less desirable part of Main Street," he said. "But I believed in the city's plans to revitalize and grow ... and that one day we'd be right in the heart of downtown, and that happened."

Now with seven concepts, a catering operation and a food truck, Table 301 has very strategically evolved alongside Greenville. Sobocinski said he is inspired by operators like Danny Meyer of Union Square Hospitality Group, who have multiple concepts concentrated in one city where they have a real impact on the dining scene.

Over the years, Sobocinski has often heard the siren call of multiplying concepts. "People have said Soby's could be in 12 cities," he said. "I'm sure that would be very lucrative if successful, but that's not my driving force. I'm so passionate about Greenville and our community. I want to keep leaving my mark here."

And that mark includes spawning future leaders. Sobocinski has the eventual exit strategy of selling his restaurants to his employees — at least all but Soby's, which he holds dear. The former Table 301 concept Papi's Tacos, for example, was spun off to Jorge "Papi" Baralles Sr., who started with Soby's as a dishwasher more than two decades ago. Jianna may be next to leave the nest as a chef there builds equity.

Still the group is expanding its catering and private-event business with the recent acquisition of an 80,000-square-foot event space dubbed the Avenue. Sobocinski is also looking to support growth of a music scene in Greenville.

"I think there's a lot of work to be done here," he said. "And if I had to get into a car for hours or on a plane all the time, I'd pull my hair out."

— Lisa Jennings