

Tupelo Honey Café launches e-commerce site for employees

New profits to pay for health care benefits

ASHEVILLE – As runaway health care costs continue to outpace inflation, businesses nationwide are struggling to provide health benefits to their employees. One Asheville restaurant has found a creative solution, with the ambitious goal of fully funding its employees health insurance plan from a new profit stream.

Tupelo Honey Café is launching an e-commerce site and dedicating all of the profits from it to fund an HMO plan for employees who work at least 25 hours a week. The restaurant will offer the insurance to employees as soon as the site generates \$60,000 in profits, the annual estimated cost of the plan for its 47 employees.

“In the meantime, our employees can continue to take advantage of our current health plan, which reimburses managers 80 percent and employees 50 percent of their monthly health insurance premiums,” said Proprietor Stephen Frabitore. “Compared with a lot of restaurants, we already have a good plan; but we want to do more and are confident that through merchandising and e-commerce, we can fully fund our HMO beginning in late 2009.”

Offering health insurance is a perk that will enable Tupelo Honey Café to recruit and retain employees, Frabitore added.

“Restaurants are notorious for having high turnover, so the health care plan is another way Tupelo Honey Café will be able to reduce that,” he said. “We have invested significant resources in the packaging and design of trendy products to drive the initiative. We’re planning to provide a platinum-level health plan with the lowest deductibles and co-pays that we possibly can.”

The merchandising program and e-commerce site are perks for patrons of the restaurant, too. People from Massachusetts to Miami regularly order Tupelo’s special brand of fair-trade coffee, a unique and exclusive blend of Costa Rican beans sourced through Asheville Coffee Roasters.

(more)

In addition, the restaurant's local honey is sold online, and other food items will be added during the next several weeks, including its signature jams and jellies, honey butter and rosemary peach lemonade.

And there's a wide variety of THC merchandise for sale online and at the restaurant, from coffee mugs and travel mugs to hats, t-shirts, hoodies and infant onesies.

"Two very popular items this Christmas Season are our gift baskets and our gift cards," Frabitore said. "Gift cards are available in ten-dollar increments, and gift baskets range from \$21.99 to \$44.99."

About Tupelo Honey Café

Tupelo Honey Café's mission is to create a charming atmosphere with innovative Southern cuisine, emphasizing quality, selection and excellent service. A locally owned café, it has quickly distinguished itself from other regional restaurants by presenting familiar, creative comfort fare, healthier options, fresh ingredients and large portions at a fair price.

Featuring the work of local artists, the restaurant's interior has been described by *The New York Times* as "an old-fashioned tea room." Tupelo Honey Café also has been featured in *Southern Living* and *Our State* and is consistently voted one of the "Best Restaurants" by *Mountain Xpress*.

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