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Chelsea's Bearclaw Coffee strikes co-branding deal with pizza-pita-ice-cream firm

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Chelsea-based Bearclaw Coffee has reached an agreement with the parent company of Papa Romano's Pizza, Mr. Pita Sandwiches and Stucchi's Ice Cream to sell products side-by-side in some outlets.

The agreement, described as a "strategic co-branding alliance," allows Bearclaw Coffee products to be sold alongside pizza, pitas and ice cream at stores owned by Askar Brands. The parent company will decide which brands to integrate at specific locations.

"Rather than both companies becoming expert in coffee and sandwich concepts, the strategic partnership allows each company to continue evolving their own food segment," Bearclaw Coffee board member Mary Jean Raab said in a news release.

"Companies in the coffee category, for example, have just not

figured out the sandwich category on their own. This may change in the future, but our partnership allows us to do it better and quicker."

Bearclaw has 21 locations in Michigan and two in Kentucky. Askar owns 35 Mr. Pita outlets and nearly 50 Papa Romano's stores. The company has "co-branded" nine stores with its existing brands. Askar acquired a majority interest in Saline-based Stucchi's in spring 2008.

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