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## **Bearclaw Coffee forms strategic co-branding alliance with Papa Romano's Pizza, Mr. Pita Sandwiches, and Stucchi's Ice Cream**

Chelsea, Mich. – Bearclaw Coffee Company customers may soon be able to enjoy a healthy Mr. Pita wrap sandwich with their coffee under an alliance between the two companies announced today.

Bearclaw Coffee Company has formed a strategic co-branding alliance with Askar Brands, the parent company of Papa Romano's Pizza, Mr. Pita Sandwiches, Stucchi's Ice Cream and CJ's Brewing Company.

Under the agreement, the two Michigan-based companies will allow their franchisees to co-brand two or more of the brands in one location.

“By having two brands in one location, you can maximize your potential for the breakfast crowd and you can maximize your potential for the lunch and catering crowd,” said Debi Scroggins, founder of Bearclaw Coffee, based in Chelsea, Mich.

Mary Jean Raab, board member of the Bearclaw Coffee Company, says the company's alliance with Askar Brands is not only a great move to expand day parts, it also allows company leaders to leverage expertise in the various food segments.

“Rather than both companies becoming expert in coffee and sandwich concepts, the strategic partnership allows each company to continue evolving their own food segment. 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,” Raab said.

Askar Brands has nine co-branded units in southeast Michigan, Denver, Colorado and Houston, Texas that have successfully co-branded Mr. Pita Sandwiches' healthy wrap sandwiches with Papa Romano's Pizza's award-winning pizza, said Gary McCausland, chief development officer of Papa Romano's Pizza and Mr. Pita Sandwiches.

Askar Brands has found co-branding can keep an establishment busier throughout the day by generating two revenue streams under one roof, McCausland said.

“Being busy during more hours of the day generates more cash flow and a higher return on investment,” McCausland said.

Scroggins said 70 percent of sales at Bearclaw Coffee shops occur between the morning hours of 5 a.m. and 11 a.m.

Mr. Pita Sandwiches has 35 franchise units which do the majority of their business from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily, while the bulk of the nearly 50 Papa Romano's Pizza stores' sales occurs in the evening and on weekends, McCausland said.

"We see Bearclaw Coffee shops as a strong partner and are excited to work with them," said Askar Brands CEO Casey Askar.

Askar Brands has nearly 100 franchise units operating in seven states and has 500 franchise units under contract to be opened in the next 10 years.

Founded in 2002 at a single roadside store in Dexter, Mich., Bearclaw Coffee now has 21 stores in Michigan, two in Kentucky and four Bearclaw Mobile coffee trucks in both states. Bearclaw Coffee is a member of the International Franchise Association, Minority Fran and Vet Fran, in which military veterans get a 15 percent discount off the franchise fee.

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