



Back to basics

Veteran restaurateur returns to his roots with upscale burger concept

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Bill Shumate

TITLE: partner

COMPANY: Square One Development LLC

HEADQUARTERS: Tampa, Fla.

UNIT COUNT: 3

ANNUAL SALES: \$7.5 million

BIRTH DATE: Nov. 27, 1930

EDUCATION: business degree, University of Oklahoma

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: opening four restaurants, serving as former president of Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association

PERSONAL: single, two children

HOBBIES: sailing, golf

Forty-seven years ago Bill Shumate was selling toothbrushes and combs in Oklahoma. He admits he wasn't very good at it, but when he turned his attention from personal-care products to food, his business acumen revealed itself. □

During his nearly 50 years in the restaurant industry, Shumate has found success in different independent restaurant concepts in Oklahoma and Florida, including Bella's Italian Cafe, a popular Tampa, Fla., eatery that this year celebrates its 25th anniversary. And now, at 80, he is setting his sights on growing a burgeoning better-burger chain called Square 1 Burgers & Bar. □

"The restaurant business is exciting to me," Shumate said. "I like the pace of it. You walk in in the morning, and you have no idea what will happen that day. And it's just as well you don't know. □

"I love the people," he added. "It's exciting opening a new restaurant. It's work, but doesn't seem much like work." □

Square 1 is not your traditional quick-service burger operation. The prototype, which sits in a shopping center off University Avenue in Sarasota, Fla., features an upscale bar, chandeliers, round cowhide booths

and burgers made of everything from ostrich, bison and turkey to portobello, tuna and Kobe beef. Even elk, boar and kangaroo are on the way.□

Customers use cloth napkins and real silverware, and burger prices range from \$6.99 to \$15. Shumate's favorite burger is the one he has loved since his days in Oklahoma — the Theta burger, which includes tomato sauce, pickles, mayonnaise and beef.□

Square 1 is joining a growing number of concepts specializing in burgers, one of the few menu items seemingly impervious to the effects of the recent recession. In May 2010 Port Washington, N.Y.-based The NPD Group reported that sandwiches and burgers were the only food category to grow in 2009, with consumers eating more than 22 billion of them.□

And better burgers have been particularly popular, with concepts such as Five Guys Burgers and Fries and Smashburger experiencing major growth spurts. According to Chicago-based market research firm Technomic, the number of better-burger units grew 21 percent between 2008 and 2009, helping sales grow 18 percent in the same period. □

□ **Crossing over to food** □

After Shumate left his job selling combs for Johnson & Johnson, in 1964 he opened a burger joint across the street from the University of Oklahoma campus in Norman, Okla. He called it Across the Street, a literal interpretation of the restaurant's location in relation to the university.□

Sed Kennedy, a pal of Shumate's from Oklahoma and a former operations manager for the Steak and Ale and Bennigan's casual-dining brands, helped Shumate in his first burger venture.□

"He told me he would teach me the restaurant business and would come down every day for the first 30 days from Oklahoma City," Shumate said. "And you know what? He did. He came down every day. It was a lot of fun. It beat selling toothbrushes."□

Kennedy added, "We caught on to a real good concept, and it was a pretty hot burger restaurant in that part of the country." □

In between opening Across the Street and Square 1, Shumate started two other restaurants. From 1973 to 1983 he owned Butterfield's, a casual grill-and-bar concept in Oklahoma City.□

And in 1986 Shumate and his then-wife, Joanie Corneil, moved to Tampa and opened Bella's Italian Cafe. Shumate credits Corneil for the restaurant's success.□

"She realized the good food was in Italy," he said. "She was a purist. She wanted the silverware to lie on the napkin just like the way it did in Italy."□

He also noted that Bella's was ahead of its time in the use of a wood-burning oven and plum tomatoes year-round. □

"It's been a really good restaurant," Shumate said. □

Coming full circle □

Now Shumate is turning his attention to burgers again. His partners in Square 1 are Corneil and her husband, Ray Leich. The first unit opened in 2008, and two more have debuted in Sarasota in the past six months. Another is slated to open in Fort Myers, Fla., by year's end, and more Florida locations are being scouted. □

Similar to Across the Street, Square 1's name also is literal, reflecting Shumate's return to where he began. But the similarities end there. Shumate, a 1952 University of Oklahoma graduate, opened Across the Street, where customers used phones at the table to order their burgers, for between \$30,000 and \$40,000. Startup costs for the upscale Square 1 were \$750,000. □

"I have worked with [Shumate] for the past year and find him to have such great business instincts and passion for everything he does," said Leich, chief operating officer of Square One Development LLC, which will grow the chain. Leich is also a franchisee of OSI Restaurant Partners LLC and operates 34 Outback Steakhouse and four Bonefish Grill restaurants. □

"I have learned so much from him this last year and am so proud to have him as a dear friend and business partner," Leich continued. □

Leich said the two new Square 1 restaurants in Sarasota are exceeding sales expectations, with one expected to pass \$2.5 million in sales this year and the other expected to pass \$2 million. □

Michelle Griffith, who has known Shumate for 15 years and dines at both Bella's and Square 1, noted Shumate's experience and ability to build partnerships. □

"He's very thoughtful, reflective, steady and consistent," said Griffith, who used to do marketing for the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association. "Some people can be loud and brash. Not Bill. He's a quiet leader." □

Jim Stutzman, who also has known Shumate for 15 years and has dined at all three Square 1 restaurants, said Shumate's concepts reflect his diverse knowledge. □

"He's real solid and down-to-earth," said Stutzman, a land development consultant who lives in Tampa. "At Square 1, he and Joanie work hard at being innovative in terms of food and the marketing. They don't sit

back and wait for people to come in. They update the menu every six months — they don't wait for the menu to get stale. They seem very attentive." □

At 80, Shumate, a father of two, said he'd like to spend more time sailing even as he stays active in Square 1. □

"Bill is a pretty sharp guy," Kennedy said. "He did a great job with his hamburger concept. Bill is willing to pay the price to remain successful." □

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