

Nutrition-solutions firm puts health on the menu

By ERICA LAMBERG
Correspondent

MenuDirect, based in Piscataway, provides personalized nutrition solutions for consumers with dietary restrictions and also to those pursuing personal diet goals.

President and CEO Lou Cooperhouse said MenuDirect operates in New Jersey and the United Kingdom and designs, develops and markets its proprietary products directly to consumers.

"I believe that we are one of the only companies that does what we do — providing custom wellness meals directly to our customers," he said.

MenuDirect markets products under the brands Custom Cuisine and Dietary Specialties. The Custom Cuisine line offers a modular menu of fully prepared products targeted primarily to individuals with weight management concerns, diabetes or both. Dietary Specialties products are designed for those with dietary restrictions such as gluten intolerance, severe protein restrictions or difficulties associated with chewing or swallowing.

"Gluten-free entrees including macaroni and cheese, lasagna dinners and desserts like brownies are some of the choices available," said Cooperhouse. "With frozen entrees like these, it really offers those adhering to a special diet lots of options."

Similarly, Custom Cuisine entree choices include meals like cheese pizza, grilled chicken and meatloaf, as well as several desserts.

Cooperhouse said that de-



MenuDirect's president and CEO Lou Cooperhouse, center, is joined by Debra Small, director of marketing, left, and Tim Morck, vice president of research and development, to sample some of the company's products.

STAFF PHOTO BY ED PAGLIARIN

livery directly to consumers is convenient and cost-effective.

"It's less expensive than going out to a restaurant and just a little bit more than the conventional frozen entrees available at the supermarket," he said. "And the advantage is that these meals were specifically designed for the consumer."

Customers have the option of ordering seven meals a week or just a few entrees to "fill-in" their diet. "Our typical customer orders every two months or monthly and uses the meals as needed," Cooperhouse said. Items are shipped via two-day carrier directly to the customer's home and are packed in a dry-ice container.

MenuDirect houses prod-

uct-development, distribution and customer-service functions in its 53,000-square-foot facility in Piscataway. Production of meals is outsourced to 30 suppliers so the company can stay focused on product-development and growing the business.

"We market over 210 products," said Cooperhouse. "Most of the products are developed here, on-site, with our registered dietitians and chefs who work closely with our scientific advisory board to ensure the highest quality meals."

Most of MenuDirect's customer base is generated through Internet marketing and strategic alliances. Cooperhouse anticipates a 200-percent growth in sales

LOCAL BUSINESS

MenuDirect

Address: 865 Centennial Ave., Piscataway

Business: Provider of personalized meals

President and CEO: Lou Cooperhouse

In Business: 3 years

Employees: 40 in New Jersey, 10 in United Kingdom

Phone: (732) 980-6700

in 2001, and reports the company plans to expand the Custom Cuisine component of the business more aggressively through alliances with pharmaceutical companies and physician's offices.