



The retailer conducted a thorough SKU evaluation ahead of the remodel to ensure the market's product mix matches customer preferences.

'Fancy Parker's' Gets Even Fancier

Parker's Market undergoes a gourmet makeover to enhance its foodservice offerings

By Danielle Romano

The winds of change were calling Parker's Market Urban Gourmet's name. And Greg Parker, president and CEO of The Parker Cos., operator of Savannah, Ga.-based Parker's convenience stores, was prepared to heed the call.

Dubbed by the company as "Fancy Parker's," Parker's Market Urban Gourmet opened in 1999 to provide customers with an upscale, one-stop shop, grab-and-go experience in a market setting. Today, the flagship location remains open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"At the time, there was no 24/7 retail option for convenience items, freshly prepared foods, gourmet foods, fine wine, craft beer and creative gifts. I knew there was a need to open an upscale, 24/7, grab-and-go experience in Savannah, featuring a market with prepared foods," Parker recalled to *Convenience Store News*.

Residing in a restored 1899 Mediterranean-style building located at 222 Drayton St. in the heart of Savannah's National Landmark Historic District,

Parker's Market has since been featured in *USA Today* and named the No. 4 best restaurant in Savannah on TripAdvisor.

"Earning accolades from TripAdvisor is especially meaningful to us at Parker's because that honor comes from our customer base," the chief executive said. "... [It] is a grassroots vote of confidence from our customers who choose to go online and rave about our hot deli offerings — from our award-winning crab stew to our delicious chicken tenders made with hormone-free and antibiotic-free chicken breast."

Still, a remodel of the store had been in sight for some time. The location underwent one major remodel in the fall of 2007. With spring traffic just around the corner and with January trending as a quieter month, the retailer decided the timing was right for a remodel, knowing it would have minimal effect on customers and local staff. During the remodel, staff were offered vacation days or the option to relocate to a different store — whichever their preference.

In mid-January, Parker's announced via the company's Facebook and Instagram accounts that "big changes" were coming to the "Fancy Parker's." Less than two weeks later — 12 days to be precise — local residents and tourists were welcomed back to the newly renovated Parker's Market Urban Gourmet, which had transformed into a foodservice oasis.

A LESSON IN MERCHANDISING

From its inception, the core design and layout of Parker's Market has remained largely the same. However, that cannot be said about the store's product mix. A practice that has remained tried-and-true for the retailer at its flagship location is that it consistently redefines and expands the product selection based on consumer demand and customer preferences.

One way of doing this is analyzing by SKU to determine which products are popular and which are less popular, and adjusting its inventory accordingly.

"Parker's Market is an evolving concept in terms of its aesthetics, design and product mix," explained Parker. "I agree with Steve Jobs that it's important to understand the changing desires of consumers and to anticipate their needs."

Evaluating the SKUs and services of Parker's Market before the remodel revealed the store had too much space dedicated to wine and gifts, and not enough space for packaged beverages and prepared foods. Parker's customers were also looking for more healthy options.

It is with this feedback that the retailer decided to introduce a full-service salad bar to "Fancy Parker's." The salad bar — a trend that has been popping up at c-stores in recent years — offers more than 30 toppings and homemade salad dressings.

A hot panini press has also found residency at Parker's Market, offering a selection of specialty flatbread sandwiches, complete with a sauce and condiment bar with 30-plus fixings.

For those looking to satisfy their sweet tooth, the store's bakery case has been expanded, now loaded with a variety of freshly made cookies, brownies, muffins, bagels, and more.

Customers looking to quench their thirst during sultry Savannah days have a bevy of beverage choices via Parker's Market's expanded selection of fountain and frozen drinks, including newly added milkshakes and specialty bottled beverages like artisan juices, craft sodas and cold-brew coffees.

As part of the retailer's strategy to offer more of

what customers are looking for, the executive decision was made to remove the growler station at Parker's Market. "Sales at the growler station didn't justify the space devoted to it at Parker's Market. We decided to make our packaged beer more accessible with reach-in, doorless coolers, and to focus more on the craft beer category," Parker explained to *CSNews*.

Beyond product offering, the interior of Parker's Market also received a new, innovative look. With strategic aesthetic changes to the store's layout designed to make the customer experience more convenient, the check-out area was removed and replaced with a queue line for impulse items. The retailer also expanded the kitchen; replaced coolers; ordered custom-made equipment for optimal freshness and quality; replaced fixtures; and upgraded the store's lighting. The remodeled look was finished off with retiled walls, porcelain brick, flatiron accents, and Mediterranean-style tile throughout the store.

SOMETHING UNIQUE

The Parker's Market remodel is just one of several ways Parker's is growing strategically and responding to the evolving needs of its customers. According to Parker, the remodel is a calculated step in the company's five-year plan, which is to exceed \$1 billion in annual sales. The five-year plan was announced during the company's 40th anniversary in 2016.

When asked if customers can expect to find another Parker's Market opening in the future, Parker assured *CSNews* that this store is a one-off for the retailer. "This store has always been a unique concept for Parker's, and we intend to keep it that way," he expressed.

Parker's operates 48 convenience stores throughout southeast Georgia and South Carolina. **CSN**



The additions of a salad bar, panini press, and expanded fresh beverages were part of the store's transformation into a foodservice oasis.