

A Fresh Take on On-the-Go

The Chopped & Pressed Café caters to busy consumers searching for wholesome, quality food By Danielle Romano



Gas Land Petroleum tapped a Michelin-star chef turned consultant to help develop the Chopped & Pressed menu.

TACKLING THE COMMON MISPERCEPTION of what “gas station food” is can be a hefty undertaking for even the most seasoned operator, but Mitch Nesheiwat, president and CEO of independent wholesale petroleum distributor Gas Land Petroleum Inc., was up for the challenge when he created the company’s first Chopped & Pressed Café concept.

filling up on their way to work would appreciate quality options just as much as the hospital clientele, especially if offered to them “on the go,” Zeidan told *Convenience Store News*.

At a Glance Chopped & Pressed Café

Creator:

Gas Land Petroleum Inc.

Location:

Crystal Run Service Station,
2 Ben Gillman Way,
Middletown, N.Y.

Size: 5,200 square feet

Unique Features: Hand-crafted sandwiches, soups and salads; online ordering, catering, delivery

While visiting a relative at the Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla, N.Y., Nesheiwat was inspired by the fast-casual bakery and café Au Bon Pain located on the hospital’s first floor, with its bustling crowd of hospital staff, nurses, and visiting family and friends. He was immediately drawn to the idea of providing warm, fresh food options in a location that is already packed with people going about their busy lives.

“Mitch was especially drawn to the concept and efficiency of the soup and salad fast-casual restaurant, and noticed how patrons were enjoying the fresh, quality food in an environment that does not typically lend itself to such items,” recounted Zeidan Nesheiwat, Mitch’s son and Gas Land’s vice president. “Terrible hospital food is about as cliché as terrible gas station food, or franchises that microwave what they say is a fresh sandwich.”

Gas Land took the soup and salad fast-casual concept, combined it with what the company knows best — gas stations — and thought specifically about how customers

Goodbye Tin Foil, Hello Handcrafted

The Chopped & Pressed Café concept made its debut on Dec. 8, 2017 at Gas Land’s newest site, Crystal Run Service Station in Middletown, N.Y. The company had originally been working on placing a deli in this station, but Mitch scraped that idea — along with the prospect of tin foil-wrapped sandwiches — after finding the inspiration for Chopped & Pressed.

Combined with Gas Land’s aspiration to build a stronger presence in New York’s Orange County, where it currently owns and supplies more than 20 locations, Zeidan said Crystal Run Service Station was the “perfect” place to debut this kind of new concept because of its proximity to the Town of Walkkill’s “medical corridor,” the New York State Trooper Barracks F, four major branded hotels, and busy roadways.

“As any good business person would do, we surveyed the area to determine whether quality soups and salads were otherwise available in the area and noticed a gap in the market,” Zeidan said. “We set out to fill that gap to better serve the community and offer people like local cops, medical professionals, and hungry commuters wholesome meal options.”

Gas Land tapped Michelin-star chef turned consultant Anthony Nichols to help develop Chopped & Pressed's menu of handcrafted sandwiches, soups and salads. Nichols has experience working with popular fast-casual restaurants, such as Pret A Manger and the New York-based American eatery Dig Inn.

Today, Chopped and Pressed's menu features:

- Sandwiches, like the Upstate Grilled Cheese made with

a full-service Dunkin' Donuts on the left and a fully-stocked convenience store on the right. The Chopped & Pressed Café is prominently positioned front and center, highlighted by a glass case showcasing menu options. Customers who are in a rush can pick up ready-made Chopped & Pressed offerings from a cold case located in front of the café's counter. The concept also offers online ordering, catering and free delivery.

Other amenities include: a Dunkin' Donuts drive-thru; indoor seating, as well as patio seating in the warmer months; an ATM; 52 parking spots; 12 fueling positions; a milkshake station; an air machine and vacuum; and a Coca-Cola Freestyle fountain machine.

“Essentially, we hope that Chopped & Pressed will be the first choice for lunch breaks, coffee runs, or gas stops alike. We want to upgrade work meetings and conferences with more than just the typical wedge of deli meats.”

— Zeidan Nesheiwat, Gas Land Petroleum Inc.

country bread, fresh mozzarella, cheddar and provolone cheeses, herbs and butter;

- Bowls, like the Falafel and Sriracha Chicken;
- Build-your-own salads; and
- A variety of soups.

“We gave Chef Anthony our vision and he presented various options, and we worked together from there to fine-tune the menu. With the master menu set, we are still improving and coming up with new ideas with fresh, wholesome ingredients,” explained Zeidan.

Aesthetically, Crystal Run Service Station and its Chopped & Pressed Café exudes a sleek, modern look that is light, bright and features clean lines. Upon walking in, customers are greeted by

Future Franchising Opportunities

Currently, Gas Land's Crystal Run Service Station has a franchisee for the Sunoco convenience store, but as of now, Chopped & Pressed will remain company-operated until the franchisee is “110 percent trained and the menu is fully completed to our liking,” according to Zeidan.

Gas Land is in the process of introducing Chopped & Pressed into three existing gas station locations. The company also has growth plans in three Hudson Valley markets. Zeidan said more Chopped & Pressed Café locations will be determined through a site-by-site analysis.

The company has even begun to receive inquiries for franchising the concept.

“We did not expect to receive inquiries for franchising so soon. We anticipated for entrepreneurs to wait for us to have a proven concept, but what they saw was enough to ask for additional information,” said Zeidan. “That positive feedback prompted Mitch to roll out franchising by [this] spring, rather than his original plan, which was 2019.” **CSN**



Fresh, wholesome ingredients are the cornerstone of Chopped & Pressed, which offers both made-to-order and grab-and-go options.