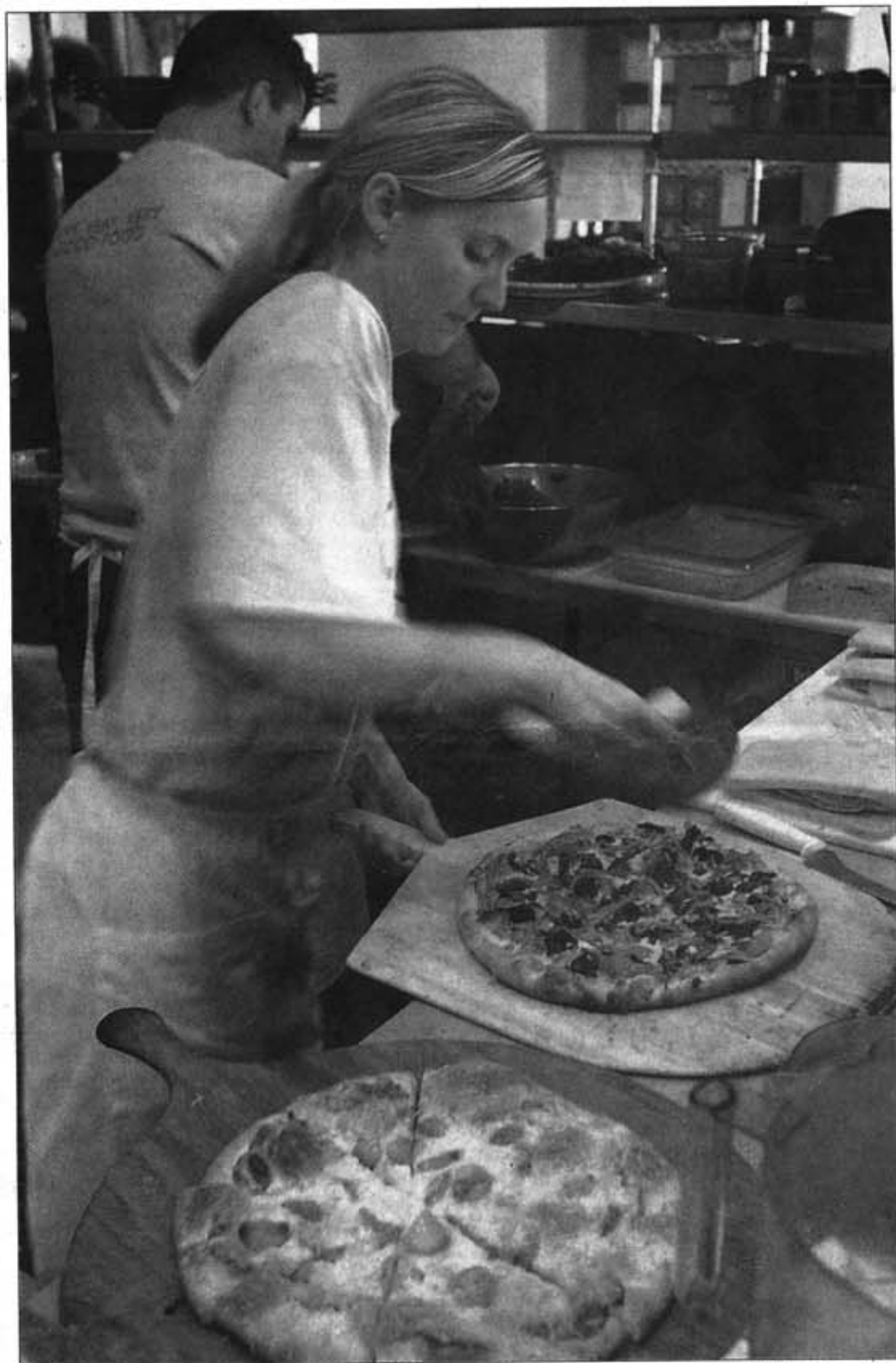


E.V. eateries stretch their wings



SLICING UP: Head chef Nola Krieg works in the kitchen at 3 Tomatoes & a Mozzarella restaurant in Scottsdale.

Sandwich shop, pizza restaurant plan to go national

By **DONNA HOGAN**
TRIBUNE

A Scottsdale pizza restaurant and a Tempe sandwich shop are cooking up plans to go national.

Scottsdale-based Global Restaurant Concepts, which has propelled local chef Eddie Matney's Wild Noodles concept from its two East Valley eateries into a national chain, plans to do the same with 3 Tomatoes & a Mozzarella and Dilly's Deli.

Only 12 Wild Noodles have opened so far, said Global Restaurant Concepts president George Krotonsky, but 220 more franchises have been sold and are scheduled to open within the next six years.

Now Krotonsky has taken on Dilly's Deli and its popular Dilly Bird and Doozy grilled sandwiches.

The Tempe chain, started by buddies Shaun Kelley and Jeff Weninger in 1993, has two locations near Arizona State University. Krotonsky has already sold five Valley franchises, and has "other states in the pipeline."

The first new Dilly's Deli is slated to open at Thunderbird and Scottsdale roads on the Scottsdale-north Phoenix border, in March. A second shop is planned for Phoenix, and the local franchisees haven't closed yet on other locations.

"We're looking at several sites, mostly in the East Valley, because that is where the growth is," Krotonsky said. "Within the next two years, we will have five locations open in the East Valley."

Krotonsky said the white, cracked wheat and dark rye

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SEE EATERIES • PAGE B2

BUSINESS

TRIBUNE

EATERIES: 'It's a competitive field'

FROM PAGE B1

bread, baked fresh on the premises, is what makes Dilly's sandwiches different from the competition.

"There's no question it's a competitive field," he said. "There are 16,000 Subways. But this is a higher quality sandwich and a higher quality experience. People going out to lunch can make a choice to trade up."

The Scottsdale Airpark area was ideal for the first new store, Krotonsky said. With well-heeled entrepreneurs clustered in the airpark, the area could use a gourmet lunch spot, he said.

Fresh-baked bread — and pizza crusts — also make 3 Tomatoes & a Mozzarella appetizing as a franchise, Krotonsky said.

He's already sold 10. A Tulsa, Okla., restaurant is

scheduled to open in February.

A Las Vegas version will start cooking the Scottsdale restaurant's signature pizza, pasta and panini in April, he said.

"The market is changing, and baby boomers are driving the changes," Krotonsky said.

"There's been a shift from fast food to fast-casual — not quite full service, but not pre-cooked food either. People want higher quality."

Both Dilly's Deli and 3 Tomatoes & a Mozzarella fit the niche by providing gourmet grub in a setting that is comfortable but without the elaborate restaurant atmosphere, he said.

Other chains that have been successful catering to the fast-casual trade are Chipotle, Baja Fresh and Scottsdale-based PeiWei Asian Diner, Krotonsky said.

For Nancy Roskin, who

started 3 Tomatoes & a Mozzarella with her husband, Jeff, after the couple moved to Scottsdale from Connecticut three years ago, it's a chance to take her secret recipe gourmet pizza to other locales without losing the personal touch that she believes is part of her restaurant's charm.

"I want people who come here to feel like it's their place," she said. "When you come to my restaurant, I know who you are."

Roskin said that means having franchisees who will take the same personal interest in the food, atmosphere and customers rather than having corporate ownership of the chain with individual locations managed by people who don't have a vested interest.

"I'm not interested in being Domino's (Pizza)," she said. "I want to keep the restaurant as special as it is."

Krotonsky, formerly an executive with Brinker International, parent of Chili's Grill & Bar, Romano's Macaroni Grill, On The Border Mexican Grill & Cantina, and Maggiano's Little Italy, used his industry knowledge to form his franchise development company.

He said developing the legal and operational structure to become a franchisor can be daunting for a small restaurant owner.

Krotonsky said he was so enamored with Wild Noodles he bought the rights to the concept himself. With Dilly's Deli and 3 Tomatoes & a Mozzarella, he provides the expertise and the wannabe chains' founders retain the rights to their concepts.

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