



Dinner's Ready

The Dinner Station

By Amanda Rogers
News-Mirror Writer

With two young children and two full-time jobs, Vonnie and Jay Worsham embraced The Dinner Station concept of prepared dinners.

In fact, they liked the idea so much that they bought their own franchise, opening The Dinner Station in Mansfield in February.

"I think the first time we went as a date night," recalled Vonnie Worsham, a commercial real estate agent. "We took a bottle of wine and quizzed the people to death. Later, when I just needed the meals, I grabbed a friend and went."

"We were customers for a year," Jay Worsham said.

Then they decided they liked the concept enough to put their money where their mouths were.

"It serves a purpose," said Jay Worsham, who quit his job as a restaurant manager to run the business. "I didn't want to get into something that I had to push. This helps families."

In the past few years, the prepared meal business has taken off, winning fans from busy people across the country. More than 200 different concepts have been developed around the basic plan of having the business do all the shopping and food preparation, but allowing the customer to put the pre-planned meals together and take them home to freeze. The meals then just need to be heated, a time-saver for busy people.

The Worshams liked The Dinner Station concept the most. Founded two years ago in Highland Village by two busy moms, The Dinner Station is more family friendly than some of the more gourmet prepared meal businesses, the Worshams say.

“The original owners concept was ‘We’re going to invite you into our kitchen,’” explained Vonnie Worsham. “If you come by yourself, you’re still able to talk to other people. It’s open and inviting.”

Instead of stations lined up against the wall, The Dinner Station has 18 meal preparation sites around four enormous islands in the middle of the room. The red, white and blue walls are bright and fun, and the commercial coolers add to the train theme. With the names of Amtrak stops plastered on different shelves, Jay Worsham can station each customer’s meat entrees at a different stop and then they can replace them with the finished meal.

“When they come in, I give them directions that send them to ‘Cincinnati,’” he said. “She goes to ‘Cincinnati’ (a shelf in the big cooler) and grabs her bag of chicken.”

Customers go online to pre-select their meals and the time they want to come in to prepare them, so Worsham has already done all the shopping, chopping and dicing by the time they get there. Customers move from one station to the next putting the meals together.

Meals can be made in three- or six-serving sizes, depending on what is best for each family.

With two small children, three servings is plenty for Mansfield mom Lori Mosley, who has prepared meals at The Dinner Station a half-dozen times since the store opened.

“I work every day,” explained Mosley, a teacher in Arlington. “It’s convenient. You can spend more time with your family. The rice or the pasta is provided so you just have to get the salad or bread - and the plates.”

Mosley also likes the way that the ingredients are separated at The Dinner Station.

“The meat is separate from the other ingredients,” she explained, “so can trim the fat, marinate it or prepare it the way you want. I sometimes cut the chicken into strips for my kids.”

And her kids like the food, Mosley said. That was important to Vonnie Worsham.

“We test marketed the food on our own children and our friends’ children,” she said. “Some of them are picky eaters, but they eat our food.”

Particular favorites are the almond-crusted chicken, blackened tilapia, Mexican lasagna, meatloafs and red beans and rice.

“The thing that sold us was the almond-crusted chicken,” she remembered. “It blew me away, the taste, presentation and the fact that I made that.”

Customers at The Dinner Station range from novice to experienced, Jay Worsham said.

“I get all types,” he said. “There are some that couldn’t tell the sugar from the flour and others that knew what tarragon was and how to use it.”

The Dinner Station offers 17 different entrees each month, plus cookie pie. There are also five side dishes, like broccoli rice casserole, cheesy potatoes and savory green beans, already prepared. Meals come in three- to six-serving portions, which customers can buy in eight-, 12- or 16-meal packages. Costs range from \$85 for eight three-serving meals to \$240 for 16 six-serving dinners. The Dinner Station will also prepare meals for the customer, normally a \$15-\$25 extra fee, but free in August.

“Some people get sticker shock,” Vonnie Worsham said about the prices. “But then they come in and see the convenience and break it down into servings. All of our products can be frozen. I may go to the grocery store and have good intentions of making something, but if I don’t make it right away it spoils and the money is wasted. Plus, you don’t have to go out and buy a bottle of spice to get one teaspoon.”

Because they buy in bulk from suppliers like Ben E. Keith and Tyson Foods, their products are fresh and reasonably priced, the Worshams say.

They also offer parties for groups of six to 20, conductor camps for chefs ages 5 and up with their parent or guardian and junior chef nights for older kids who want to cook with their parents.

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