

On the job ... with restaurant owner Loren Wash

Learning to function at the Junction

Filling a need: Loren Wash of La Plata was thinking about buying a McDonald's franchise when he happened upon Apple Spice Junction — a Utah-based restaurant chain featuring soups, salads, cookies and sandwiches wrapped in homemade bread.

Wash and his wife, Karen, then thought they might open an Apple Spice Junction in Alexandria, Va. "But with all of the new growth in La Plata, we decided to open here instead," Wash said.

The eatery opened in January on Centennial Street and has found a niche in Charles County, according to Wash, who said the customer base has been growing steadily. In fact, the restaurant has become so popular Wash decided to open on Saturdays to meet customer demand.

"We've been very well-received," he said.

Apple Spice Junction customers can either order boxed lunches that are delivered to their homes or workplaces or can eat in the restaurant. The boxed lunches are a very popular service, Wash said.

"We fill a different niche that wasn't being addressed in town, particularly delivering the boxed lunches," he said. "It's a nice service for a lot of businesses in La Plata."

People can fax orders or use the restaurant's Web site to place an order, Wash said.

The catering arm of the restaurant is also gaining steam.

"It started off slow, but we did seven catering jobs in the first six weeks," Wash said.

Working and growing: Eric Wolf, general manager, oversees the operation while Wash works the front counter from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and his wife helps baker Bryan Sauber in the kitchen.

In addition to operating the restaurant, Wash said he also serves as Apple Spice Junction's area coordinator for Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C. The job includes recruiting people interested in buying a franchise and training them in the operation of the business.

The goal is to open 30 Apple Spice Junction franchises in the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area, Wash said.

Born and raised in Charles County, Wash worked most of his career in food service in local McDonald's fast-food restaurants formerly owned by Steve Mote.

"I was going to purchase one of the last McDonald's franchises that Steve Mote owned when I stumbled on Apple Spice Junction," he recalled. "It really appealed to me. It was something that I could do that was close to home."

Although the couple has 12 employees, running the restaurant is a family affair,



STAFF PHOTO BY GARY SMITH

Loren Wash, co-owner of the Apple Spice Junction franchise in La Plata, said the restaurant has found a niche since opening in January.

Wash said. His mother and father, Ronald and Patricia Wash, helped the couple launch the business, and the Washes' three high school-age children, Brandon, Lindsay and Justin, work at the restaurant on Saturdays.

Support system: The couple received a lot of assistance from the College of Southern Maryland's Small Business Development Center on the La Plata campus, Wash said.

People interested in purchasing a franchise get a lot of help from the restaurant's corporate headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah, Wash said.

Once he had decided to buy a franchise, he flew to Utah to attend the company's "Discovery Day."

"I spent a couple of days there to see how the franchise operates," he said. "The company does a fabulous job. They have a

great system set up to help new franchises. ... There's always somebody there to help you."

Franchise owners pay a one-time fee to the corporate headquarters to open an Apple Spice Junction restaurant.

In addition, owners must pay the company a monthly royalty based on a percentage of the restaurant's sales, Wash said.

Owning and operating a franchise is a little frightening at first, but patience and persistence pay off in the end, Wash said.

"I tell prospective franchise owners to make sure they do plenty of research on the business and to expect a few bumps in the road," he said. "You can't be afraid to ask questions. Owning a franchise is a big step, and you need to be sure that you've got all of the information and facts. ... For me, it's the best of both worlds."

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