

HAWAII *hospitality*

LODGING & FOODSERVICE
NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2014

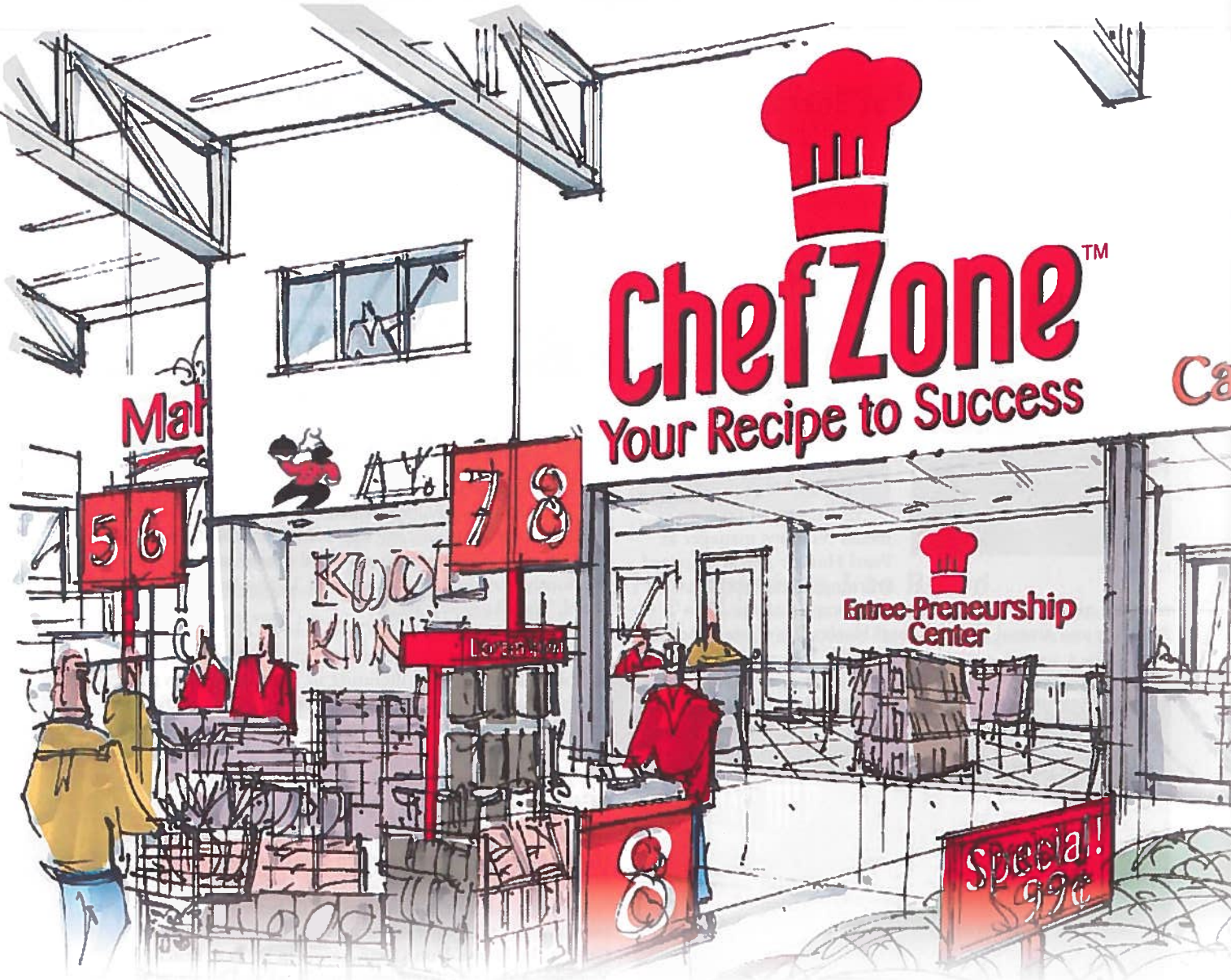


A MECCA FOR FOOD SHOPPERS ChefZone In-Waiting

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Entering the CHEFZONE

Y. Hata unveils its one-stop melting pot for business and culinary concepts

BY CATHERINE CRUZ-GEORGE

PHOTOS BY GREG YAMAMOTO

Walk into any membership warehouse club on Oahu, and there's a good chance that you, food operator, can't find certain ingredients because other shoppers grabbed them before you did. Frustrating, isn't it?

Perhaps it's time to visit ChefZone, a cash-and-carry wholesale club scheduled to open in November. The club, located in the airport industrial area, carries more than 6,000 food supplies and

equipment, and 35,000 specialty items straight from the suppliers.

Here's the best part: Membership in ChefZone is free, exclusive to nonprofit groups and food operators. In other words, off-limits to regular shoppers.

Business partners Cora Stevens and Harris Sukita plan to use ChefZone for their company, Simply Ono, which operates lunchwagons on Punchbowl Street and University of Hawaii campuses. Sukita is excited about the vast array of offerings.

"If the price is right, we'll buy veal or a pallet of mushrooms or whatever, and be creative," he says. "Our menu isn't etched in stone, and that's how we operate to keep our head above the red line."

If ChefZone lives up to its expectations, the club will be the go-to place for items ranging from bakery goods and produce, to cleaning supplies and ethnic foods. Health-conscious customers will be happy to find gluten-free and organic foods among the aisles.

"We stock a variety of product categories trending in the marketplace," says ChefZone General Manager Matt Bono, who has extensive experience in food operations in California and Washington.

He invites food-industry members to explore ChefZone's sprawling, 45,000-square-foot layout, which includes a mammoth, 91-door freezer that wraps around the fresh foods department.

Allied Builders System was the general contractor on ChefZone and the design was by MC Architects.

Over the past two years, a team of star managers and food-industry experts has joined parent company, Y. Hata & Co. Ltd., to lay the groundwork for ChefZone. Their goal was—and still is—to create a hub that will bring together food-industry members. In addition to the wholesale club, ChefZone will offer free programs, ranging from cooking demos and certification programs, to graphic design and menu planning.

Leading the programs is Matthew Small, the club's corporate executive chef. "Our goal is to help restaurants succeed by making these resources available," says Small, who has 20 years of experience in hotels and restaurants.



General Manager Matt Bono

CHEFZONE HIGHLIGHTS

Membership: Free for nonprofit groups and food-service operators with GET license and federal ID number. Register at www.chefzone.com/apply

Features: Cash-and-carry wholesale club; more than 6,000 food and restaurant supplies and 35,000 special-order items; a demonstration kitchen; a tabletop showroom; and an Entrée-preneurship Center to help business owners with daily operations.

Size: 45,000 square feet of warehouse space and 100 parking stalls (60 covered).

Employees: 40

Hours: Monday to Friday, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.;

Saturday, 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and Sunday, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Location: 2888 Ualena St. (airport industrial area)

Online: www.chefzone.com www.facebook.com/chefzonehi; www.twitter.com/chefzonehi; www.instagram.com/chefzonehi



ON THE SHELVES

- Lee Kum Kee sauces, marinades and seasonings.
- Hawaiian Eateries' ready-made foods (salads, pre-cut potatoes and fresh salsa).
- Bonewerks' Sous Vide line of demi-glace and fully cooked meats.
- Fresh, local meats and produce by Paniolo Cattle Co., Armstrong Produce and Nalo Farms.

SERVICES

- Kitchen demonstrations, food-safety certification, menu planning, food costing, social media and web design, graphic design, logo merchandise, events and production and business planning.



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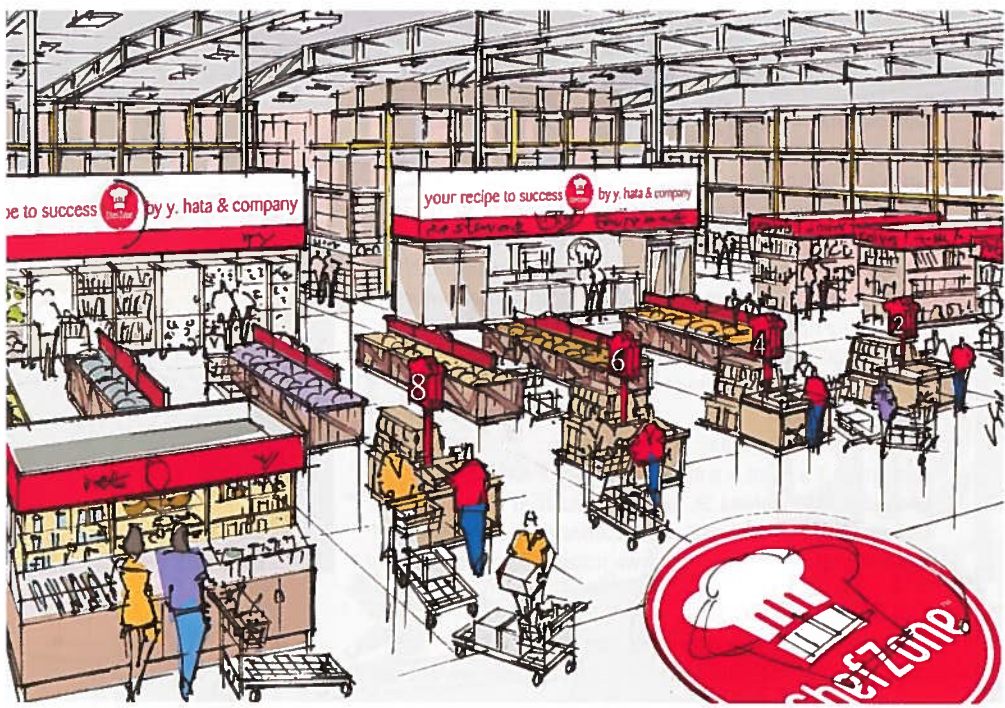
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ABOVE: Artist's rendering of ChefZone warehouse BELOW: Matthew Small in the demonstration kitchen



In November, Small and the corporate chef of Asian food company Lee Kum Kee will host a two-day demonstration on how to use the company's sauces and marinades.

Food safety is a hot topic among restaurant owners, as the Hawaii Department of Health enforces new guidelines this year. For a fee, ChefZone will offer ServSafe, a certification program by the National Restaurant Association, covering workplace safety, legal policies and foodborne illness prevention. The two-day, 16-hour course ends with an exam.

Future classes at ChefZone will address inventory, food and labor costs and employee scheduling.

The idea of cost-cutting interests Sylvia Thompson, who recently began

tracking her company's finances on a computer. She opened her raw, vegan meal-plan service, Licious Dishes, in 2007, and in 2012 opened Greens & Vines, a vegan gourmet restaurant on Kapiolani Boulevard.

"All this time, I had been shooting from the hip because I have had enough customers to keep me going," Thompson says.

Real-life stories like hers excite the leadership team at ChefZone. Once the club is fully operational, members can learn new business skills, swap culinary ideas and, of course, shop together.

"We're hoping ChefZone creates a lot of positive synergy for the food industry," Bono says. ■

SHOPPING AT THE ZONE



SYLVIA THOMPSON, OWNER
Licious Dishes, dba Greens & Vines

Vegan chef Sylvia Thompson sources her ingredients from D. Otani, Whole Foods and weekly farmers markets. She works with Mainland distributors for specialty items, such as organic seeds and truffle oils.

Popular items: Crimini Escargot, Living Lasagna and Wicked Chocolate Tart.

Business challenge: Managing human resources and food costs.

Always shopping for: Extra virgin olive oil, coconut oil and 300 pounds of non-genetically modified zucchini per week.



HARRIS SUKITA, PARTNER
Simply Ono

Harris Sukita and Cora Stevens, co-owners of Simply Ono lunchwagons, bid on fresh ahi tuna twice weekly at the Honolulu Fish Auction on Pier 38. In addition to finding staples at Y. Hata, the business partners receive regular phone calls from local vendors, offering deals on excess items.

Popular items: Hawaiian plate lunches and spicy ahi poke

Business challenge: Asking potential employees the right interview questions.

Always shopping for: 700 pounds of fresh ahi and mahi per week.