
Starbird aims to elevate the quick-service experience

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Co-founder Aaron Noveshen describes chicken-based concept as “super-premium fast food”



The Nest Egg, a breakfast sandwich, features a fried chicken strip, egg and bacon.

Starbird

Starbird. “It’s really about the quality sentiment you get in the fast-casual world, with design, comfort, food, ingredient quality and guest experience, combined with the convenience you get with QSR.”

Industry veteran Aaron Noveshen will launch a new concept, Starbird, in Sunnyvale, Calif., later this month that aims to bring the quick-service experience up a notch.

Starbird is designed to blur the lines of limited service, offering a “super-premium” menu built around fried chicken tenders served with the speed and convenience of fast food.

“We’re calling it super-premium fast food,” said Noveshen, co-founder and CEO of

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The centerpiece of the menu is a boneless, fried chicken tender that appears across a platform of sandwiches, salads and tacos — grilled chicken and tofu are also available. The chicken is sourced from Petaluma Poultry, in Petaluma, Calif. It is raised without antibiotics or genetically modified feed, and is air chilled.

Since chickens also produce eggs, Starbird will offer a breakfast lineup of sandwiches, tacos and burritos.

A key aspect, however, will be the coffee, available hot or iced.



Starbird will have indoor seating and a patio in 2,000 square feet. Rendering: Starbird

Starbird will use a new Bunn brewing system that grinds and brews each cup of coffee to order in less than 90 seconds. The concept will use San Francisco Bay Area roaster Equator Coffee, which is also served in high-end restaurants.

“Credibility in breakfast comes from credibility in coffee,” Noveshen said. “There are few who can do coffee conveniently. At Starbird, you’re going to get super-premium quality at speed.”

Noveshen is also co-founder of the seven-unit, polished-casual Pacific Catch chain (/finance/pacific-catch-captures-significant-private-equity-investment), based in the Bay Area, which recently received a significant private-equity investment for growth. He is additionally founder and president of consulting firm The Culinary Edge, which does consulting and menu work for chains ranging from Starbucks (<http://nrn.com/top-100/starbucks-coffee>) to Applebee’s (<http://nrn.com/top-100/applebees>).

Last year, The Culinary Edge created The Culinary Edge Ventures, or TCEV, a business incubator to develop and launch new concepts. Starbird is the first TCEV project.

TCEV has put together a group of investors for the first round of funding and a Series B round is in the works to build the brand’s presence throughout the Bay Area.

Noveshen envisions the concept as a chain, and a second location is planned for Foster City, Calif. Franchising could potentially be used to grow the concept down the road, he said.

More concepts are coming from TCEV, but not until after Starbird is up and running, said Noveshen.



Starbird offers Chicken and Waffle Sticks. Photo: Starbird

“We want to focus our energies 100 percent on getting the first few units of Starbird open before we think about a second concept,” he said.

Noveshen contends that fast food has fallen out of favor, but consumers still want convenience.

“There were some great things about fast food when it first came to market. Nowadays, the guest experience has really eroded,” Noveshen said. “The drive thru is not that convenient; it’s not much fun. And, design-wise, it’s a lot of plastic and laminate and materials that aren’t that comfortable.

“So we wanted to improve all the things about fast food that needed improving,” he said.

Rather than a drive thru, for example, Starbird will use technology to allow customers to stay in their cars if they prefer.

Customers will be able to order via app or online and drive into a designated parking space at the restaurant. The first location will have 17 numbered spots. Diners can then either come in to pick up at the counter, or stay in their car and click on a button via the app that says “I’m here,” and food will be fired and delivered to the car within three to five minutes.

The 2,000-square-foot restaurant will also have indoor seating and a patio.

Chicken strips star on the menu, but variety comes into play with flavors that borrow from Mexico and Korea.

At breakfast, a signature sandwich will be The Nest Egg, featuring fried chicken strips, an organic egg and organic American cheese topped with bacon. Breakfast tacos and burritos are also in the lineup, as well as chicken and waffle sticks.

Chicken tenders can also be ordered in various sized boxes, or as a combination meal with fries, tater tots, waffle sticks or slaw.

There will be no fountain sodas, only handcrafted iced teas, seasonal lemonades and some bottled artisanal beverages, Noveshen said.

Bread will be baked in house. And for dessert: hand-dipped drumstick ice cream cones.

The average check will be about \$6 at breakfast and \$9 to \$11 at lunch and dinner.

“We’re not looking to compete in the \$1 meal territory,” Noveshen said.

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