

Wine sellers sniff out Sarasota-Bradenton market

As the business of bringing a variety of wines to the masses expands, the Sarasota area appears to be on the map for several growing chains.

The latest is Cork & Olive, which is negotiating for two stores in Sarasota County, according to director of operations Stephanie Nelson.

Tampa-based Cork & Olive generally sells one store at a time and is looking for more potential franchisees for the Sarasota and Bradenton areas.

The first Cork & Olive wine store opened in Clearwater and has grown to nine, with several more expected to open before the end of the year.

Sarasota area wine lovers have already been targeted by chains Vino 100 and The Grape. Vino 100 has stores in both Sarasota and Bradenton. The Grape opened at the Plaza at Five Points in downtown Sarasota earlier this year.

Unlike The Grape, Cork & Olive does not double as a restaurant and wine bar. However, the store offers wine tastings all day with at least 10 wines on the table at a time, Nelson said.

California chain coming to state

A restaurant chain from the other west coast is heading for Sarasota County.

San Diego-based Rockin' Baja Lobster Restaurant and Beach Bar is expected to bring its Baja-style food -- including "buckets" of lobster, king crab and shrimp -- to the area as part of a Florida expansion.

The chain signed a deal with franchisees Scott Gibbs, who owns Cocomo's restaurant in Marco Island, and David Parton, who recently sold Atlanta-based home improvement company Dixie Home Crafters/Gutter Guard, a spokeswoman said.

The franchisees are expected to open five restaurants in Sarasota, Charlotte, Collier, Lee and Monroe counties over the next few years. They're starting in Naples, where the first restaurant is expected to open by summer 2007. Sarasota will likely be the next stop.

Second Bun in the Oven to open

Bradenton's A Bun in the Oven will soon get a sibling.

A second store of the same name selling maternity clothes, baby clothes and accessories is expected to open in the area next year. The store is slated as a tenant in San Marco Plaza in Lakewood Ranch, scheduled to open in early 2007.