

ConvenienceStore  
NEWS

# STORE OF THE FUTURE

SPECIAL EDITION



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BUSINESS INFORMATION

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# The Convenience Restaurant

Mall food court meets convenience in this store-of-the-future vision

By **Melissa Kress**

Rendering created by King-Casey

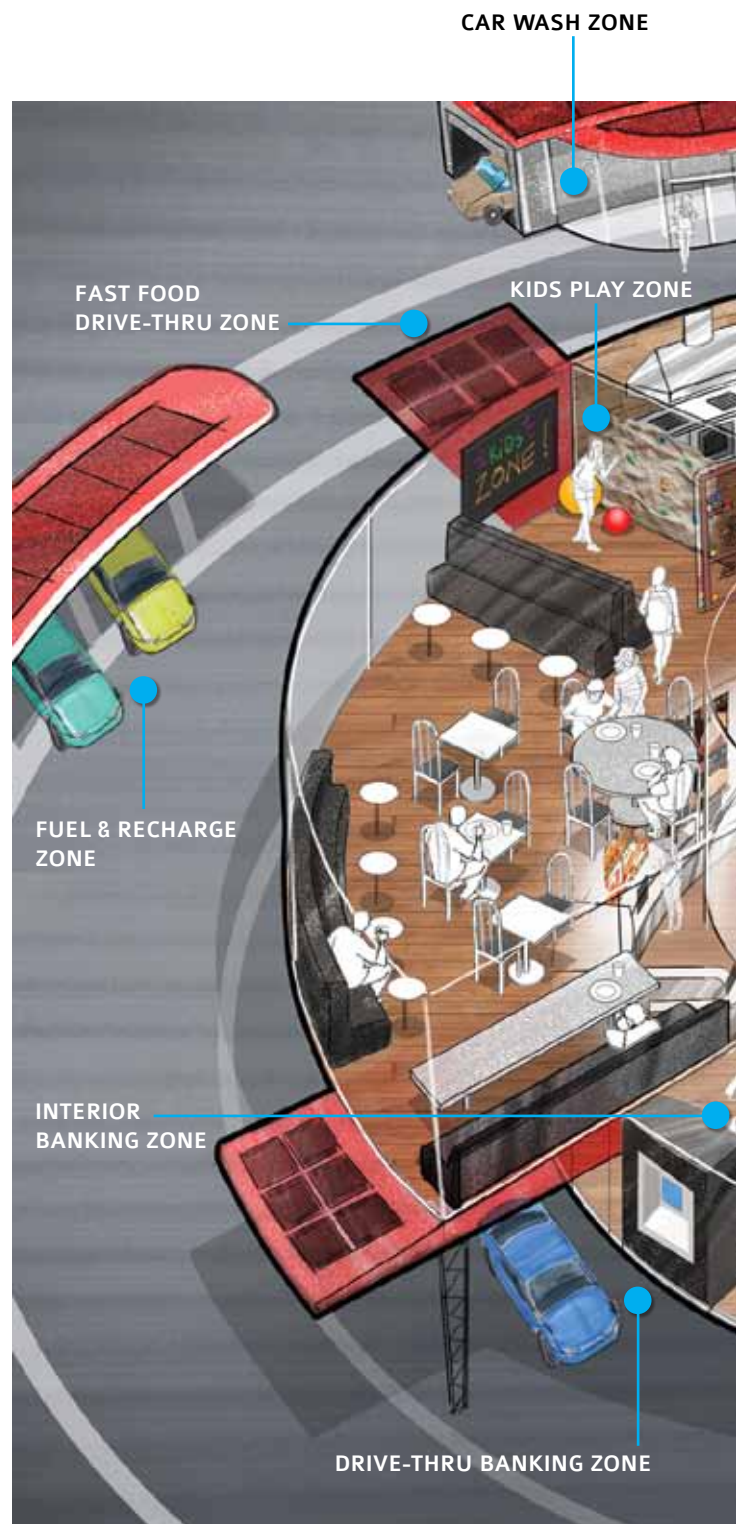
In March 2012, then-Wawa Inc. CEO Howard Stoeckel spoke before a crowded lecture hall at St. Joseph University's Food Industry Summit in Philadelphia and explained that Wawa didn't want to be "lumped into convenience stores or quick-service restaurants (QSRs)." Instead, the retailer considered itself a different breed: fast casual on the go.

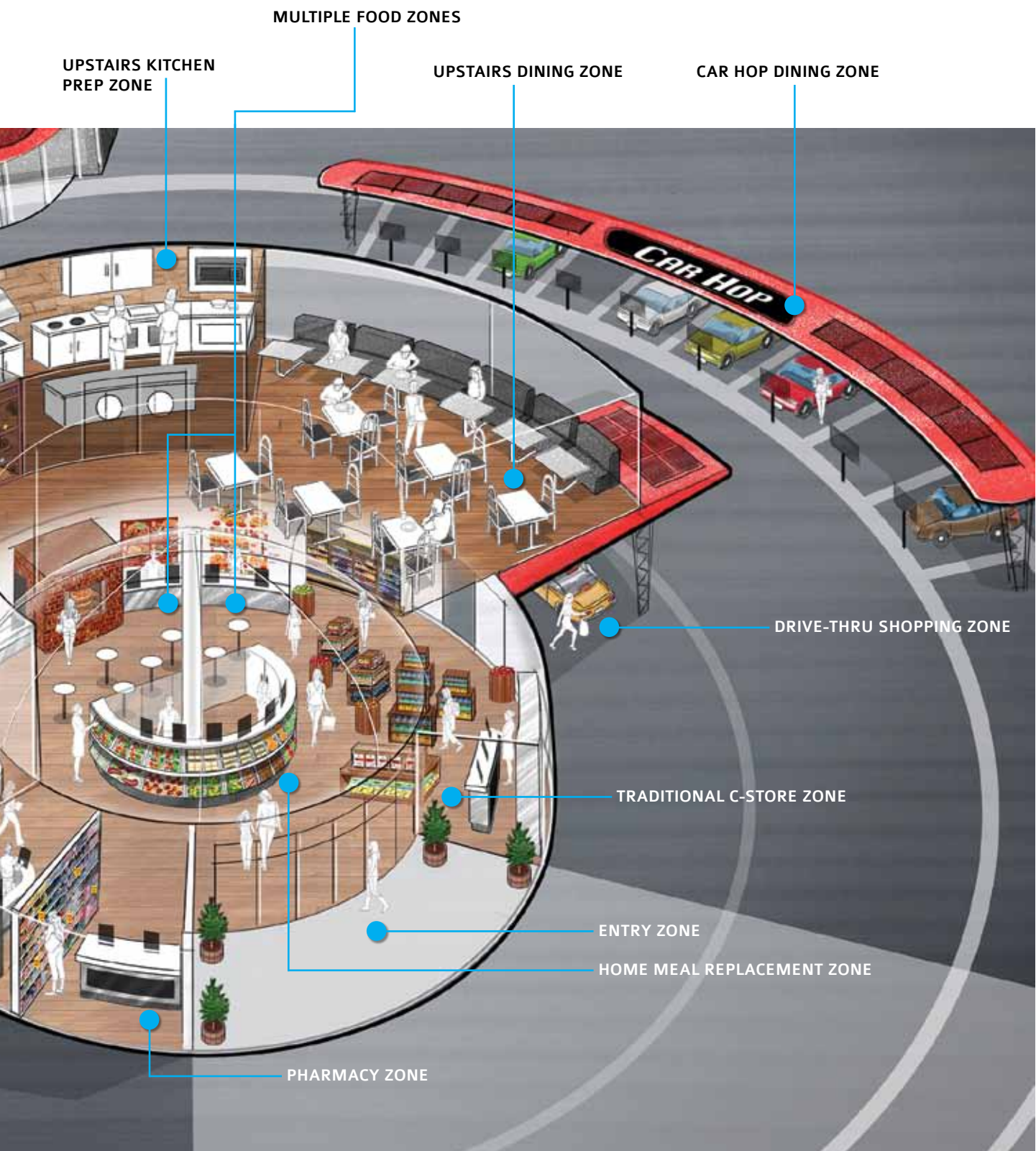
Fellow Pennsylvania-based convenience store chain Sheetz Inc. also has been transitioning itself from a traditional convenience store operator to a made-to-order fresh food retailer. It even started to put a heavy focus on restaurant-style hospitality in its training and employee development.

Wawa and Sheetz are slightly ahead of their time, as one of the convenience store industry visions of the future is the convenience restaurant, which will compete head-to-head against fast-casual restaurants and QSRs, as well as supermarkets and other fresh-food resources.

"Future c-store strategies should be developed based on targeting both existing customers and non-customers, identifying their unique needs, and developing a store experience that meets and surpasses all of their expectations," said Howland Blackiston, principal at Westport, Conn.-based design firm King-Casey. "To be successful, tomorrow's c-store should put a revolutionary focus on being a one-stop destination for conveniently satisfying the assorted needs of various sets of customers."

There are three customer (and non-customer) groups c-store operators must focus on in the years ahead: traditional convenience store users, Millennials and what King-Casey refers to as Balancer Moms. Because each of these groups has different needs,





Blackiston said c-stores of the future will be divided into “customer operating zones.” Each zone, he explained, will be responsive to the unique needs of each different target customer set.

COZI, short for Customer Operating Zone Improvement, is already a strategic principle for King-Casey, which has been in the business of retail branding and design for 61 years. COZI focuses on understanding customer behavior to develop brand-specific solutions that make the customer experience easier and more pleasant overall.

“Each zone should take into account that different customers have needs and expectations that are different from one zone to another,” Blackiston noted. “And so, the design of each zone (specific features and communications) must be different from one to the next, so as to meet and surpass target customer needs and expectations.”

For this concept to work, c-store retailers will have to establish specific business goals for each zone, and identify zone-specific merchandising strategies and

design features responsive to how customers use the zones. The zones will then be designed to achieve the business objectives.

The result will be a faster, easier and more enjoyable customer experience and a strategy that distinguishes the brand in the market and maximizes business results, Blackiston said.

“The c-store of the future will have identified its customer base and their specific needs and behaviors. This understanding will dictate how the store is designed, and the services and products it will offer,” he added. “To directly compete with QSRs and fast-casual restaurants, as well as supermarkets and other fresh-food resources, it will put a particular focus on food-related offerings.”

King-Casey envisions the convenience restaurant concept consisting of:

- **Multiple Food Zones:** The store includes a variety of themed food concepts, as you would find in a mall’s food court. These zones feature informal seating for those in a hurry, and adventuresome

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variety and choice to satisfy a variety of needs. Primary customers for these food zones are Balancer Moms and Millennials.

- **Upstairs Kitchen Prep Zone:** This area services and supports the multiple food concepts on the ground floor and also the home-meal-replacement zone.
- **Upstairs Dining Zone:** Comfortable and varied seating zones allow for more leisurely dining. Different areas of the upstairs dining can appeal to different audiences (families, singles, etc.). Primary customers for this zone are Balancer Moms and Millennials.
- **Car Hop Dining Zone:** Drive up, park, order and pay by touchscreen. The customer's meal is brought right to the car. It is safe and convenient. Primary customers are Balancer Moms and Millennials.
- **Fast Food Drive-Thru Zone:** Drive up, order and pay for choices from any of the store's several themed food concepts. There's something for everyone. Primary customers are Balancer Moms, Millennials and traditional c-store users.

- **Home Meal Replacement Zone:** Here customers can pick up an array of top-quality prepared meals to go. Primary customer is Balancer Moms.
- **Kids Play Zone:** A family-friendly area for children to play while their parents eat. Primary customer is Balancer Moms.

Additional zones could also be added to bring a mix of traditional convenience store and suburban strip mall. These zones would include a drive-thru shopping zone; a traditional c-store zone; a pharmacy zone; an interior banking zone; a drive-thru banking zone; a car wash zone; and a fuel and recharge zone.

Aside from how the store is laid out, retailers will need to be environmentally responsible, Blackiston advised. In the store of the future, for example, all roof surfaces will feature solar panels. The materials, fixtures, lighting and architectural details of the concept will all underscore a brand's commitment to Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) standards. These attributes appeal in particular to Balancer Moms and Millennials. **CSN**



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