

FAST CASUAL

IDEAS & TRENDS FOR THE FAST-CASUAL RESTAURANT

#4

**McAlister's
Deli,
Ridgeland, Miss.**



2006

Top 100 movers & shakers

Panera bakes the competition

Most diners and investors alike have forgotten McAlister's Deli was originally a dentist's sideline venture. But 17 years and 200 restaurants into McAlister's history, it's one of the best limited-service restaurants in all the land.

Today, it's owned by private equity firm Roark Capital Group. The average restaurant seats more than most fast-casual concepts — 130 indoors with outdoor dining at some locations. And it enjoys an average check of \$7.25.

A big chunk of the credit is due to CEO Philip Friedman. From the time he purchased the deli chain for \$9 million in 1999, he has been responsible for all the financial and franchise functions. Friedman also implemented a system-wide crisis communications plan that paid huge dividends when a North Carolina McAlister's was linked to an E. coli breakout.

Although nobody can ever be truly prepared for such an incident, McAlister's handled the intense situation flawlessly.

"After we knew about it, we contacted all of our managers to answer questions and all our franchisees," Friedman said.

— Julie Sturgeon