



Nation's Restaurant News names 2022 winners of CREATORS and Hot Concepts Awards

Wendy's, Dine Brands, Capriotti's & Smokey Bones among winners of this year's CREATORS Awards; 4 emerging brands will also be honored as Hot Concepts at CREATE

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, July 27, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Nation's Restaurant News, the leading source for news and business intelligence for restaurant and foodservice professionals, has named the 2022 slate of CREATE Award winners, which includes the CREATORS Awards, honoring excellence in restaurant leadership and innovation, and Hot Concepts Awards, which recognize the industry's most exciting emerging concepts.

Winners will be honored at the second annual [CREATE Experience](#), a one-of-a-kind gathering of restaurant industry leaders, Sept. 19-21 in Denver.

The CREATORS program, sponsored by Keurig Dr Pepper, honors brands and people in six categories. The CREATOR of the Year will be announced from among those winners at CREATE this fall.

"The pace of change in the restaurant industry is faster than ever before, and the brands that will succeed in the future are the ones able to think differently and seize opportunities through a combination of creativity, ingenuity and grit," said Nation's Restaurant News editor-in-chief Sam Oches. "The six winners of this year's CREATORS Awards embody that spirit of innovation, and we can think of no better place to honor them than at CREATE this fall, where our focus is on the future of foodservice."

The 2022 CREATORS winners and their respective categories are:

- **Wendy's** (Brand CREATOR — 201 units or more): The quick-service giant is recognized for its innovative approaches to menu, value and customer experience as well as its forward-thinking tech strategies, including early moves into the metaverse.
- **Capriotti's/Wing Zone** (Brand CREATOR — 200 units or less): The company is being recognized for the brand revamp and renewed growth of fast-casual Wing Zone, which Capriotti's acquired in late 2020.

- Ascend Hospitality Group (Independent CREATOR): The Bellevue, Wash.-based restaurant group is honored for innovative efforts to support and empower employees, including an expanded benefits program, and mentorship and development opportunities.

- Dine Brands (Applebee's and IHOP) Dining Concepts (Marketing CREATOR): The casual-dining company is being recognized for achievement at both of its brands, including viral marketing moments at Applebee's as well as the rollout of a new loyalty and customer rewards platforms at IHOP.

- Smokey Bones (Operations CREATOR): The full-service barbecue concept is honored for its innovations around off-premises dining, including its first drive-thru, new digital ordering tech and more "purposeful design" to improve the customer experience while increasing throughput.

- Bonanno Concepts (Leadership CREATOR): The Denver-based restaurant group is recognized for its dedication to employees, which includes the hiring of a corporate therapist to support workers' mental health as well as a tip equity program to ensure fair pay.

The CREATORS Awards are selected by the editors of Nation's Restaurant News. Winners will be recognized during a panel discussion at the upcoming CREATE event.

Also at the event, four emerging restaurant brands will be honored as the Hot Concepts winners. The leaders of the brands will be featured in a panel discussion on the opening day of the show.

The 2022 Hot Concepts Award winners are:

- HomeState, a Texas-style taco concept with five locations in Los Angeles
- BLNT Burger, a 11-unit plant-based concept founded by chef Spike Mendelsohn
- Project Pollo, an 11-unit plant-based brand focused on plant-based chicken and sustainable practices
- Sixty Vines, a five-unit concept from Front Burner Dining Group, featuring wines on tap and shared plates, sandwiches, salads and pizzas

"Identifying and celebrating the next wave of restaurant leaders is a key part of the mission of Nation's Restaurant News and CREATE," Oches added. "We are proud to highlight these four young concepts, which are each tapping into today's trends to connect with consumers and chart a path for ambitious growth."

The Hot Concepts Awards have been awarded by Nation's Restaurant News for more than 25 years to exciting emerging restaurant brands, many of which have gone on to national prominence. Past winners include The Cheesecake Factory, Panda Express, Noodles & Company, Jamba Juice, True Food Kitchen, CAVA and Bareburger.

CREATE, held at the Sheraton Denver, is a unique gathering where restaurant leaders from the largest chains to the most innovative emerging growth chains come together to provide insightful presentations, drive meaningful conversations, build new relationships, and showcase foodservice innovations.

Event highlights include:

- Keynote address from celebrated marketer and digital innovator Bonin Bough
- Bop Up Food Festivals featuring the latest culinary trends
- “Ask the Experts” Q&A sessions on tech, labor, menu and more
- Off-site tours of award-winning Denver restaurants
- Fast-paced learning through Fireside Chats and Lightning Keynotes
- Hands-on food and beverage tasting sessions

In addition to the CREATE Award winners, the [growing lineup of CREATE speakers](#) also features nearly 50 leaders from such restaurant brands as P.F Chang’s, Coffee Bean + Tea Leaf, Big Chicken, Duck Donuts, Torchy’s Tacos, Another Broken Egg, Modern Restaurant Concepts, Zalat Pizza, PINCHO, Rasa and many more.

Visit [CREATE](#) to learn more.

ABOUT NATION’S RESTAURANT NEWS

Nation's Restaurant News (NRN) is the No. 1 source of business information for the foodservice industry. For more than 50 years, NRN has served the information and engagement needs of foodservice professionals, offering award-winning content across all mediums with the goal of driving businesses forward. NRN is part of the Restaurant & Food Group by Informa Connect, the leading B2B integrated media group connecting products, solutions and thought leadership with the largest, most engaged and highly qualified audience in foodservice and food retail. Learn more at www.nrn.com.

ABOUT CREATE

CREATE: The Future of Foodservice is the destination for the foodservice industry to learn, connect and grow through year-round live digital experiences, robust on-demand resources and an the CREATE Experience held September 19-21, 2022 in Denver, Colorado. Learn more at create.nrn.com.

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