



# Franchisees of Excellence

**John Tietzen**  
**Inland Restaurants**  
**Kelowna, British Columbia**

**pas·sion·ate - ('pa-sh(ə)-nət) adj. enthusiastic, ardent**

Passionate is one word that best describes long-time Wendy's franchisee, John Tietzen. Tietzen is passionate about many things: the Wendy's brand, his staff, giving back to the community and most importantly... his customers. Customer service is number one for Tietzen, and every business decision he considers is first examined from the customers' point of view.

"Our customers are the most important part of our business and the decisions we make all support that," reflects Tietzen. Since becoming a franchisee in 1988, he's learned from some of the best customer-focused operators at Wendy's: Dave Thomas, Jim Near, Gordon Teter and Ed Ourant. "Each of these men had a common characteristic that I really admired. They were all committed to the quality of the customer's experience. The decisions they made were not only based on what was right for the business, but also, and most importantly, what was right for the customer." Tietzen believes that many Wendy's operators today still believe in these timeless ideals.



## *Observing customers can improve sales*

In addition to being hands-on with his business, Tietzen is an avid people-observer. He frequently makes unannounced restaurant visits to monitor customer service. And, at the Pick-Up Window he simulates the customers' experience, scrutinizing everything from the menu board to the sound quality of the speaker box and friendliness of the order taker.

His observations often become a "call to action" to improve customer service. For example, during his study of the Pick-Up Window, he noticed that customers would often feel pressured to quickly place their order, leaving little time to review the variety of products and promotions offered. His solution to improving the customer's experience? Placing an additional menu board in the drive through line, which allows customers more time to consider their choices before pulling up to the speaker.



*"Welcome to Wendy's. Would you like a moment to look over the menu board?"*

Tietzen also considered that the additional menu board may have a negative impact on service times. And it did. Average service times at the Pick-Up Window slowed from 110 to 120 seconds. But while service times decreased by 10 seconds, Pick-Up Window sales actually increased by about 3%. Tietzen is proud of the achievement. "In our restaurants we refer to speed of service as 'friendly service times'." He added, "When you give the customer a better experience, they'll come back more often."

## Dining Room – Fast service doesn't have to be impersonal

Dining room sales are a key component of Tietzen's business, generating nearly 50% of Inland Restaurants' total sales (Wendy's system average is about 30%). Not surprising when you consider that Inland Restaurants' customers are treated like family and are often greeted by name. "Customers love to know they are appreciated. It makes them feel special," said Tietzen. Inland Restaurant employees are taught to recognize customers by name, with a friendly greeting.

At the dining room counter, order accuracy improved when "Accuview" was installed on the respective cash registers. "Order accuracy is just as important in the dining room as it is at the Pick-Up Window", said Tietzen. In addition, during peak lunch and dinner times, one employee (host/hostess) is assigned to work the dining room and is dedicated solely to improving the customers' experience. They take care of customers by being friendly, asking how their meal is and by keeping the dining room and restrooms clean. Tietzen refers to this as a full-service restaurant experience in a quick-service environment. He believes that fast service doesn't have to mean impersonal service.

Tietzen firmly believes that the higher-than-average-sales his restaurants achieve are a direct result of his focus on the customer. "So far this year, our customer counts are up 3.8% and sales are up 8.4%. We're projecting a record sales year in 2007, with average unit volumes expected to reach \$1.9 million (Canadian \$). I am delighted with our success, and we have our customers and employees to thank. I became a franchisee in 1988 because I believed in the quality of the Wendy's product. It's up to me to make my business a success."

### Profile at a glance:

**John Tietzen**  
Inland Restaurants  
Kelowna, British Columbia

Number of restaurants: 9  
Franchisee since: 1988

**Committees:**  
WCAP/FAC (President)  
Menu Council

**Wendy's Awards:**  
Hall of Fame 2006  
Founders Award 1998  
Dave's MBA  
Two-time Diamond Award Winner  
Five-time Sparkle Winner  
Two-time Wendy Award Winner

## Past experiences have prepared Tietzen to be a leader

As a former college and Canadian Football League (CFL) player, Tietzen has gathered a wealth of experience about teamwork and managing during high pressure situations. "The restaurant business, like football, can be quite intense," said Tietzen. The objective is to take a whole bunch of people and come together for a common goal."

Tietzen also said he learned something extremely important from former Miami Dolphins coach, Don Shula, the winningest coach in NFL history. "Shula was so successful over a long period of time because he adapted his coaching style to the players, instead of forcing the player to adapt to his style of coaching," said Tietzen. "I apply these same principles to managing people. Employees of today are much different than employees

of the 80s and 90s. They think differently and need to be motivated differently."

Tietzen motivates his staff (crew) with monthly profit sharing bonuses when restaurant goals are achieved. Employees learn early on that there is a direct correlation between customer service and increased sales. And, receiving frequent bonuses satisfies their need for immediate gratification, and inspires them to do more.

## Giving Back

Tietzen's passion for sports led him to sponsor youth soccer leagues in his community. Each year since 1989, more than 8,500 children take to the various indoor and outdoor soccer fields dressed in Wendy's "keeper" jerseys, provided by Inland Restaurants. In addition, team pictures are proudly displayed in each of his nine restaurants throughout the year.

And, since 1995, Inland Restaurants has raised more than \$650,000 for the Sunshine Dreams for Kids "Dreamlift" program. Dubbed as "Wendy's Dreamlift Day", all gross profits received from restaurant sales from the day, along with employee, manager and owner wages are donated to the Dreamlift Disneyland program. The program sends children with severe disabilities and life threatening illnesses to experience Disneyland for the day. "There is an emotional connection with everyone who is involved in this program. Wendy's 'Dreamlift Day' would not be possible without the dedicated efforts of many current and former employees, local sports personalities and business people in our community," said Tietzen.

"I wholeheartedly agree with Dave Thomas' belief that you should always give something back and share your success with the community that has supported you."



## Change is good

Tietzen's passion for his customers and his community is reflected in the numerous awards he has received in the 19 years since joining the Wendy's family. (See profile at a glance for a list of his Wendy's awards.)

"Wendy's gives its franchisees more flexibility to control their own destiny. There's a lot in this world that I am not happy with, a lot that I have no control over. I look at the things that I **can** control and what I **can** do to run my business well," explained Tietzen. "A lot has changed since 1988, and you have to change with it. I've learned that I had to look at myself honestly and become part of the solution."

And, while quoting philosopher George Santayana, Tietzen muses, "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."