



JIM RUDOLPH

RESTAURANTS: Rita's, the nation's largest Italian ice concept, with more than 500 locations in 17 states

HEADQUARTERS: Rita's Franchise Company, Trevorse, PA

WHAT HE'S DONE: Since taking over as chairman and CEO in 2005, Rudolph has presided over a complete rehab of the 25-year-old company's culture, franchise system and image ("Rita's. Ice. Custard. Happiness"). He also began introducing a series of on-trend new products—the first in nearly a decade—such as the Light Line of sugar-free Italian ice and Slenderita fat-free soft-serve, Ritaccino coffee beverages, Blendini blended items with mix-ins and Gelati ice and custard combos: "In the treat segment, you need to give people a reason to come back again and again and again."

WHY WE LIKE HIM: Rudolph, 59, never meant to stay on at Rita's, but when he and his brother and a group of investors bought the company in 2005, the former Wendy's and Chuck E. Cheese franchisee found himself hooked by the uniqueness and potential of the concept.

WHAT'S NEXT: Rita's celebrates its 25th anniversary on-track to add more than 60 units this year, as well as new ice flavors like S'Mores and Swedish Fish. "The fact that we are very inexpensive—even less expensive than ice cream—makes Rita's pretty recession-proof," laughs Rudolph.

—JOAN M. LANG



ICE. CUSTARD. HAPPINESS. MASCOT.

