

**On the Menu:
Hot Dogs, BBQ,
Cold Drinks...
and Axes**





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What’s the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of hot dogs? Maybe it’s buns. Or beer. It probably isn’t axes — that is, unless you’ve visited a Crave Hot Dogs and BBQ. More about the axes later.

Building on Experience

The husband-and-wife team of Samantha and Salvatore Rincione founded Crave Hot Dogs and BBQ in 2018. Both Rinciones have had extensive restaurant industry experience: more than 15 years’ experience for Samantha and over 25 years for Salvatore. “We decided it was time to make a brand that we could call our own and start to build our own company,” Samantha says.

After doing market research, they settled on a hot dog and barbecue concept, and the first Crave opened in Georgia. To say it was an immediate success is a bit of an understatement; within a few years, the chain expanded to 20 units, and now stands at 30 units and 9 food trucks.

All Crave units are franchised, and a majority of franchisees — 85%, by Samantha’s estimate — are veterans of the U.S. military. Salvatore is a veteran, which helps create a special connection between Crave and the vets. “When they get out of the military, a lot of people need something to do. They need a second career,” says Samantha.

“They need to integrate into so-called normal life without being in the military, which is very challenging for a lot of people.” Understanding this, Crave established a special program for veteran franchisees to help them integrate into the business. “It’s a business where you don’t need food experience to run, so they’re able to hop in there and run the business effectively.”

If customers can’t come to Crave, Crave can come to them via food trucks. Crave has food trucks in eight states, which “are basically a Crave on wheels. They have every piece of kitchen equipment our restaurants have,” Samantha says. The 22-foot-long trucks service special events or sell from designated city food truck areas. Customers can even request a food truck for their events by booking it on the Crave website. The trucks have proven wildly popular, Samantha says: “A lot of them wind up being booked [for] breakfast, lunch and dinner daily in addition to private events.”

Menu Mania

The Crave menu has a mind-boggling array of hot dog choices — everything from traditional favorites like a chili cheese dog and a Chicago-style dog to a loaded baked potato dog (topped with tater tots, bacon and cheddar cheese) and a cheesy mac dog (topped with macaroni and cheese, bacon and even more cheddar). The “BBQ” in the name appears on a number of menu items, including sandwiches, tacos,

sliders and a mac ‘n’ brisket bowl, which Samantha says is one of the chain’s biggest-selling items. Crave also sells the barbecue items by the pound for at-home enjoyment. An array of sides and desserts round out the menu. The chain also features a limited-time offer each quarter. “We try to keep it fun and interesting,” Samantha says.

True Crave fanatics can order off the secret menu, says Samantha. “We have a secret menu that only people who vigorously follow us on social media know about,” she says. The secret menu features short-term items that don’t appear on the regular menu. Customers love it, she says “because they know there’s something out there that other people don’t know about. It’s very fun. A lot of customers really like it, especially the regulars.”

Another big draw at Crave is its wall of beer taps. Each unit has between 18 and 32 taps installed in a self-service setup, with touch screens above each tap with information on each brew. Customers load value onto a card, which they then swipe at the tap for their desired drink.

Burying the Hatchet

It’s not unusual for bars or restaurants to have an entertainment component, such as pinball machines or a dart board. But Crave’s entertainment option has really hit the bull’s-eye with many customers. “We were looking for something very fun, very interesting to bring people in as an entertainment-type venue,”

A Metro holding cabinet keeps food warm in the kitchen.



Samantha says. “We did a lot of research and found there are axe lanes that are actually digital. It’s a real wooden board [with] real axes.” In a walled-off area, adult customers can throw the axes at targets projected digitally at the end of the lane. “You can do Connect Four, Kill the Zombie, Tic-Tac-Toe, things like that,” she says. Other customers can stand outside the lanes and watch the axe-throwing fun. All the Crave units opened in 2023 have the lanes, and the chain is retrofitting older units. The axe lanes are such a hit that “the Crave model moving forward will all include axe lanes,” Samantha says.

Choosing the Right Ice

Crave’s equipment supplier, Burkett Restaurant Equipment & Supplies, has been with the chain since company President Jameel Burkett connected with Samantha on LinkedIn. “We started talking, and we hit it off well with Samantha and Sal. We learned about this concept they were developing called Crave Hot Dogs and BBQ,” Burkett says. His company helped the Rinciones equip their first store, and “now we’re doing like 15, 20 stores a year with them,” he says.

So when Crave decided to use chewable ice in its drinks, Burkett made the natural



recommendation: Scotsman. “We were huge fans of nugget ice, and we did a lot of research on different vendors. Burkett said Scotsman was a great option for us,” Samantha says. “After we put in the first unit, it was very successful. So we decided to go national with it.”

But Crave gets more than just great ice from Scotsman — it gets great service as well. “What I like about Scotsman is if they have a recommendation or see room for improvement somewhere, they’ll give me a call. They don’t take their customers for granted,”

Samantha says. “I think they look at their customers and say, ‘How can we improve that customer experience?’ And they work to do that without even being asked. That goes a long way with us here.”

Besides the Scotsman ice machines, Crave also relies on Metro holding cabinets and walk-in coolers from Kolpak®, a Welbilt® company, to keep product cool.

A Bright Future

Burkett sees the growth potential for Crave to be just about limitless. “They’re doing

Crave has a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere.



The Scotsman ice machine stands ready to deliver popular nugget ice for beverages.

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Scotsman®

Machines installed worldwide:
1,000,000+

Tons of Scotsman flake ice and nugget ice cubes produced daily:

12,500

Scotsman ice cubes produced daily worldwide:

6 billion

Crystal-clear ice cubes introduced:

1950

The Original Chewable Ice introduced:

1981

scotsman-ice.com

it right,” he says. “We’ve worked with a lot of other concepts that can never get out of the startup mentality. But Samantha and Sal know how to build a franchise business. I think they’ll be in every state in the country in the next five years.”

Ken Harris was previously Regional Sales Manager for Scotsman, and is currently Vice President of Sales at ACP Inc. He agrees that Crave has the right recipe for success. “The concept is interesting and fun,” he says. “I’ve been to several of their

locations and always enjoyed the food and atmosphere. I’m glad their customers love Scotsman’s nugget ice. Samantha and Salvatore are great people, driven and hardworking, and are doing great things to grow the business responsibly.”