

Crisp & Green founder's latest concept Paco & Lime will have 12 Twin Cities locations in 2 years

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Crisp & Green founder Steele Smiley is officially launching his third fast-casual chain, Mexican restaurant Paco & Lime, with plans for a dozen locations in the Twin Cities within two years.

Paco & Lime's first location is slated to open in Minneapolis' North Loop neighborhood in December, followed by two more in Maple Grove and Wayzata in early 2023. Smiley's healthy lifestyle company, Steele Brands, hasn't yet announced its plans for the nine additional locations in Minnesota.

Franchise rights for the Twin Cities and two other markets outside of Minnesota have been claimed so far. Some Paco & Lime franchisees also own Crisp & Green franchises, Smiley said.

Paco & Lime's menu features tacos, bowls and burritos; drink offerings will include beer and frozen margaritas. It was developed by chef Bill Fairbanks, Steele Brands' chief culinary officer and executive chef, who has experience with Latin cuisine and created menus for other local restaurants, including Barrio.

Paco & Lime was initially expected to debut at the beginning of the year in Wayzata, where Smiley launched salad chain Crisp & Green in 2016 and plant-based burger chain Stalk & Spade in 2021, both of which are in the midst of aggressive growth plans.

Crisp & Green now has more than 20 locations in seven states, with plans for dozens more. But it had the good fortune of growing in a market without a big national competitor — although California-based Sweetgreen has begun opening Twin Cities locations, most of Smiley's rivals so far have been local.

Paco & Lime, in contrast, will compete against Chipotle Mexican Grill, which has nearly 70 locations just in Minnesota. Smiley seems eager for the matchup.

"I've made no secret of my desire to go directly after the incumbent players that we all know well," Smiley said. "Our team is driven by the opportunity to innovate beyond the core offerings that established brands have been serving for more than 20 years with very little change. I think customers will be excited by the innovative, healthier and made-from-scratch menu options that Paco & Lime is bringing to the Latin fast-casual dining experience."

Brianna Kelly

Reporter

Minneapolis / St. Paul Business Journal



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Steele Smiley is the CEO of Steele Brands, parent company of Crisp & Green, Stalk & Spade and Paco & Lime.