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AllergyEats Founder Advocates for Food Allergy Training & Education At Nation's Largest Casual Dining Chain

Encourages Applebee's to Improve their Food Allergy Protocols

BOSTON, MA (November 2, 2010) – Paul Antico, founder of AllergyEats (www.AllergyEats.com), the fastest growing source for finding allergy-friendly restaurants, is encouraging Applebee's, the country's largest casual dining chain, to better accommodate food-allergic diners.

The dialog with Applebee's began a few months ago after Antico's dairy-allergic colleague had a frustrating – and frightening – experience at the chain, where the staff was unable to prepare a dairy-free meal for her. She spoke at length with both the server and manager, and was concerned that neither seemed familiar with the restaurant's ingredient lists and food preparation protocol. Even after a long conversation about her "trigger foods," they brought her a meal covered in creamy, dairy-based sauce, which she couldn't eat.

The experience was chronicled in a blog entry on AllergyEats, resulting in an unprecedented outpouring of commentary from others within the food allergy community, talking about similar experiences at the chain.

Antico contacted Applebee's corporate headquarters, alerting them to this feedback and offering to begin a dialog about how the chain could improve its food-allergy practices – and thus improve its service to the millions of people with food allergies and intolerances.

"Restaurants need to better educate their entire staff about food allergies and implement very clear protocols to accommodate food-allergic customers," explained Antico, the father of two food-allergic children. "If restaurants don't train their staff about food allergies, the consequences could be dire."

"Some restaurants do a great job – like BJ's Restaurants, a chain that recently added new practices to meet the needs of guests with food allergies and gluten-intolerances. Other restaurants – like Applebee's – should consider these diners' overwhelmingly negative feedback and re-examine their food allergy policies," Antico continued.

Antico insists that he's not trying to humiliate Applebee's, but rather striving to persuade the chain to implement new, chain-wide policies and procedures around food allergies and intolerances. As the largest casual dining chain in the country with over 2000 locations, Applebee's is an industry leader, and by adopting new allergy-friendly policies, they could help set a precedent for other restaurants to follow.

"During a string of conversations with Applebee's spokespeople, they continuously directed me to their website for information about their menu and ingredients. Sharing that information should definitely be part of their food-allergy policy, but cannot be the full extent of it," Antico explained. "They need to better educate their staff about how to accommodate food-allergic

diners, ensuring that they're knowledgeable about the menu and ingredients, as well as food preparation techniques and serving protocol."

"We've had subsequent conversations regarding Applebee's potential willingness to re-examine this issue and improve their policies," Antico continued. "There's no downside to becoming more food-allergy friendly. Implementing new protocols around food allergies will be beneficial to Applebee's, improving community relations and bringing in more food-allergic diners, which will ultimately increase their profits. I hope to help them experience these benefits by exacting positive changes for our community."

"We will be exploring new and different ways of delivering information, and training our team members, so that we can communicate more effectively with our guests who have food sensitivities or allergies. Additionally, we are providing follow-up allergen training materials to all restaurants," said Sam Rothschild, SVP of Operations for Applebee's Services, Inc. "We will provide further updates to you on developments in this area and look forward to an ongoing dialogue."

Antico is encouraging restaurants nationwide to become more aware of – and better trained around – food allergy issues.

A former fund manager at Fidelity Investments, Antico started AllergyEats after dining out with his two food-allergic children and becoming frustrated by the inconsistencies in restaurants – some were willing to accommodate food-allergic diners and some were not. He created AllergyEats to be a quick, easy online restaurant guide that indicates where food-allergic individuals could more comfortably eat.

In addition to launching AllergyEats, he serves on the Board of Directors of the Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America, both nationally and for the New England Chapter, and works to increase awareness and education about food allergies.

AllergyEats is a free, user-friendly website that provides valuable peer-based feedback about how well (or poorly) restaurants accommodate the needs of food-allergic customers.

AllergyEats lists well over 600,000 restaurants nationwide, which food allergic diners can rate. The site also offers information on restaurants' menus (including gluten-free menus), allergen lists, nutrition information, certifications, web links, directions and more.

AllergyEats has received a number of endorsements from highly-respected food, health and allergy organizations, including the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Gluten Intolerance Group, and the Massachusetts Restaurant Association. Additionally, AllergyEats is forming exciting partnerships with other organizations, including restaurant chains, established food allergy non-profits and more.

For more information, please visit www.AllergyEats.com.

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