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**Baldor increasing presence in Baltimore region**

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By

Keith Loria

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[Baldor Foods](#) is one of the largest importers and distributors of fresh produce and specialty foods in the Northeast and mid-Atlantic regions.

“We serve everyone from restaurants to colleges to country clubs,” said Bill Hodge, director of sales for Baldor D.C. and Philadelphia. The common thread is that they tend to be ingredient-driven and often chef-driven. They care about flavor, freshness, quality, consistency and sustainability—values that align to our own.”

The company opened its first Maryland facility in Laurel in 2012 and began servicing Baltimore at that time. Over the ensuing years, it has increased its commitment to the region.

“Baltimore is an important and growing market for chefs and restaurants,” Hodge said. “We’re seeing more openings in Harbor East and Hampden for example, as well as within smaller neighborhoods. Positioning our warehouse in Maryland was a strategic decision based on our ability to service several markets from one location. It allows us to grow as Baltimore does, while also supporting D.C. and Virginia customers.”

The company is making great progress on getting a new facility in Lanham, MD up and running, which includes retrofitting the space and adding sales executives, drivers and warehouse workers. Baldor’s aim is to be servicing clients from there by the end of Q2.

Behind the scenes, President Michael Muzyk announced his retirement after more than two decades with Baldor.

“His presence is a loss we’ll all experience, but the company has also been bolstering the leadership team in anticipation of his retirement, most recently in operations and logistics,” Hodge said.

Something the company is really excited about is having earned certification as a Great Place to Work on its first attempt.

“Great Place to Work is a globally recognized authority measuring the employee experience,” Hodge said. “The certification process included a survey of our 2,500 employees, in which 3 out of 4 said they consider us a ‘great place to work,’ citing price, camaraderie and fairness as some of the reasons they love working here.”

So far, 2023 has been a decent year for Baldor, even through a softening economy.

“I think consumers are experiencing a post-COVID hangover, meaning they spent money aggressively as the pandemic waned even in the midst of rabid inflation,” Hodge said. “Now they are

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now starting to feel the aftereffects and tightening purse strings a bit more. This is causing something of a softening of their spend at restaurants, but despite these conditions, our business has continued to grow, thanks to new restaurants continuing to open and minimal closures.”

Baldor is continuing to find growth by expanding its categories, also.

“While produce remains a strength, we also have applied the lens use to source quality produce to sourcing the other categories our chefs need,” Hodge said. “We’re growing in grocery, dairy, meat and fish. And we’d like for our chefs to think of us first for all parts of their plates. In addition, a goal we have going into 2024 is to create more alliances with local growers in the DMV region.”

This year, Baldor is seeing greens like little gem lettuce, arugula, and salad mixes rising up to the top, probably due to last year’s lettuce issues with the transition times and INSV.

“Chefs are changing their mix to not be so dependent on romaine as last year,” Hodge said. “In addition, avocado usage continues to grow, if you can believe it. And our Fresh Cut items are growing in sales, owing to the savings they provide for labor-strapped kitchens. We sell more than 400 products, available in 1000-plus different cuts and sizes.”

Baldor works closely with its grower-shippers and farmers to support their interests and get their products in the hands of the chefs.

“We also make sure we have two-way communication: feeding back to the farmers the needs of the chefs and feeding to the chefs how growing conditions will impact their supply,” Hodge said. “In terms of building strong partnerships, what’s most important is us having the product that they need available when they need it and at the highest quality. Second to that is communication. While we offer many digital conveniences, we also aim to provide high-tough, white-glove customer service for our customers.”

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## About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

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