

Who's in the kitchen at Del Frisco's

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Mark Mednansky's recipe for success is being put to the test.

As the CEO of Del Frisco's Restaurant Group Inc., Mednansky is charged with running 39 restaurants across 20 states under three award-winning brands: Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steakhouse, Sullivan's Steakhouse and Del Frisco's Grille.



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Executive Chef Aaron Henschen, General Manager Sabrina Scully and Mednansky at the...
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Jake Dean

As he heads into the new year, Mednansky, 56, will be tasked with mitigating the rising cost of beef, balancing a collegial corporate culture with the rigors of shareholder value, competing against popular new fast-casual restaurants, updating a struggling concept and putting a high-profile lawsuit to bed.



If he can successfully lead the company through this series of challenges, Mednansky and Del Frisco's could give rival steakhouses such as Morton's, Ruth's Chris and Outback a run for their money. But if he can't handle the heat in his growing number of kitchens, his company could lose ground to bigger competitors.

A former dishwasher with almost 40 years of industry experience, including more than 10 years of executive leadership, Mednansky said he's ready to push the company to the next level.

"We're going to keep our eyes on making enhancements to Sullivan's, keep the fire burning with Del Frisco's (Double Eagle Steakhouse) and take advantage of the room we have to grow the Grille," Mednansky said. "We're trying to stay ahead of the curve."

Rising costs, competition

In his spare time, Mednansky likes to garden and watch professional bull riding. He also likes to cook. Good thing, because right now he's got plenty on the front burner.

Given his restaurants' focus on steak dishes, experts say the rising cost of beef is a key issue. From 2007 to 2012, the average cost of choice beef rose about 20 percent, according to the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#), reaching nearly \$2.91 per pound wholesale. November's average price was 8.5 percent more, hitting nearly \$3.09 per pound.

To protect profit margins, Mednansky will have to make cuts or change menus, said [Darren Tristano](#), executive vice president of Technomic, a restaurant research and consulting firm. "They have to be very innovative in new

offerings,” he explained. But Mednansky said beef represents just 33 percent of Del Frisco’s cost of sales. That percentage is higher for some competitors, Tristano notes.

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