

with an office-products company that provides 10 percent off to member companies. The organization is in the beginning stages of creating its own GPO for restaurants that are members of Local First's Devour Phoenix Restaurant Coalition.

The coalition currently has 29 members, and organizers hope to add many of the 260 restaurants that are members of Local First Arizona.

"We hope to have our group-purchasing organization up and running sometime in the fall," said Kimber Lanning, director of Local First Arizona. "Many restaurants have asked us for items such as eco-friendly to-go boxes, so that is just one of the items we are looking into providing."

Established Valley restaurants such as Macayo's and Wildflower Bread Co. are affiliates of Dining Alliance and advocates of the value of GPOs.

"Merging with Dining Alliance has given us the opportunity to have buying power, so we could keep our prices down and our margins intact," said Sharisse Johnson, co-owner and co-CEO of Macayo Restaurants LLC. "What's happened in this economic recession is that consumers are very price-sensitive, and sales have been down the past few years in the casual-dining restaurants, but Dining Alliance has helped us stay competitive."

Wildflower Bread Co. founder and CEO Louis Basile said that being an affiliate of Dining Alliance allows a smaller restaurant to negotiate to the point where business profits are more sustainable.

"We can offer a better value to our customers. It just makes sense," he said.

Republic special correspondent Johnny Gutierrez contributed to this article.

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