

Jul 15, 2014, 6:24am EDT

New executive chef at Melting Pot out to reinvent fondue

Cutting-edge fondue. An oxymoron, right?

Not if you talk to chef [Jason Miller](#), who recently joined the Melting Pot to oversee culinary development for its 135 restaurants in North America.

The fondue specialty chain, part of Tampa-based Front Burner Brands, which also includes [Burger 21](#) and Grillsmith, has enjoyed a strong 40-year run as a place people go for special occasions to have social, unhurried meals. And to cook their own food. The Melting Pot has lots of loyalists who go regularly and love their fondue. But plenty of folks simply fon-don't.



Jason Miller

Miller wants to appeal to the latter. Baby-back ribs fondue, anyone? Three-bean-chili fondue? Mac-and-cheese fondue? These and others are new menu ideas Miller is working on in his test kitchen across the hall from his office at corporate headquarters.

He stresses that all are still in the “amoebic” stage but says the restaurant will have some new menu options in the coming months. His lab also includes the two local Melting Pots, where he can not only test his idea on diners, but see if kitchen staff can feasibly execute them.

Miller relocated to Tampa from New York City, where most recently he served as executive chef and partner at the Capital Grille in Manhattan. His new job is much less day-to-day, “which I really don’t miss right now,” he said.

Miller said he was not brought in because the Melting Pot is suffering — “the company is just fine,” he said — but because upper management understands the need to effectively reinvent fondue dining in order to ensure the chain’s long-term health.

“I’m essentially deconstructing the classic idea of fondue,” Miller said, “to make it not your parents’, or your grandparents’, fondue. I’m working on creating dishes you would never think would translate into fondue.”

Eric Snider is a reporter for the Tampa Bay Business Journal.