

“We are serious

David Sands will have 28 c-stores by the end of this year, and all will soon be supplied by fresh food produced in the family firm’s new central kitchen at Kinross. Scottish Grocer paid a visit and met the team.

DAVID Sands has got healthy eating down to a T – as demonstrated by the success of the company’s “Healthy T” shop at the T in the Park rock festival at Balado near Kinross last month.

Thousands of music lovers from all over the UK gave the thumbs up to “David Sands T in the Park”, which turned over the weekly equivalent of one of the group’s medium-sized stores in its five days of trading. But Healthy T was significant beyond the cash it brought in and beyond the nutrition it supplied. It also launched the new “Eat Fresh” products made in David Sands’ new central kitchen facility, which is based at

Sands: “People want something healthier these days, and if we don’t provide it they’ll go to the multiples.”

Kinross and will eventually serve fresh food to all the David Sands stores.

David Sands is one of the most successful independent retail companies in Scotland, and much of this success has come out of understanding current consumer trends and building on them. That has included



David Sands, chief executive, David Sands Ltd.

a firm commitment to local produce and to food quality. The company was a pioneer of the

about food”

SGF HealthyLiving Programme, trialling and developing the scheme in several of its stores. It has heavily promoted local food, working with local suppliers to achieve mutual rewards.

The central kitchen takes these developments further. Fresh, wholesome ingredients, many of them locally-sourced, are used to produce healthy sandwiches, salad boxes and fruit pots, currently for 12 of the company's stores. By the end of August all stores in the group will have fresh lunch and breakfast options supplied from the facility.

Based above the Kinross store, which is the original David Sands shop, the kitchen is virtually a military operation, with one scrupulously clean preparation room currently in use and another ready for the next phase. That will include the introduction of raw meat and fish. To avoid any possible cross contamination, these ingredients will be handled separately, with two walk-in cold rooms set up for the purpose.

Head of the kitchen is chef Craig Watts, who is currently working with three staff to produce the sandwiches, wraps, salad pots, fruit pots and yogurt and cereal with fruit for breakfast. The sandwiches are all made using wholemeal bread – white bread will be introduced at a later stage – and the salad



pots are healthy but substantial, containing ingredients like potatoes, rice and chicken along with fruit and salad leaves.

This new direction in in-store foodservice doesn't mean indulgent fare will be phased out – cakes, pastries and bacon rolls are still available, and there are plans for hot food, including pizzas, to be made in the central kitchen. The healthy options simply provide more choice for consumers, as well as quality and freshness.

“We don't dictate to our customers, but we know some of them don't eat bacon rolls – my wife for example. We're



Left: the new central kitchen at Kinross is a model of cleanliness. Above: head chef Craig Watts.

hoping that this offer will appeal more to women,” chief executive David Sands says.

“People do want something healthier these days, and if we don't provide it for them they'll go to the multiples.”

The company is also working hard to develop its local food range. Premium meats by local producers like Puddledub, Auchtertool and Malcolm Allan are selling well. Scottish fish and cheese and dairy products are also available. In some ways it comes as a surprise that such premium products are doing so well in community stores, many of which are situated in areas where there is not a huge amount of wealth about.

“We don't have a lot of ABIs,” Sands says, but he questions preconceived notions about social demographics.

“There's a misconception out there that convenience stores can't sell quality, but the success we've had with Stephens Bakery shows that you can. We've been with Stephens for 11 years. It's another point of difference for us.”

Sands emphasises the importance of moving with the times, pointing out that there

are many stores that haven't changed in 20 years. “I think there are many convenience store operators who have given up on food. Some retailers will try something new for two weeks and then give up due to the wastage!”

While Sands admits that convenience retailers face challenges – many of them in the form of the big multiples – he takes a broadly optimistic approach.

“It's easy to focus on the negatives,” he says. “There are challenges – you can't ignore them – but we should be focusing on what the customers want and how to deliver that.”

One of the group's own immediate challenges is a new Sainsbury's about to launch very close to the Kinross store. However its own large and quite unusually shaped outlet, which has several partitions sectioning off different areas, is to get a major refit next January. And with freshly-made food being produced in the central kitchen upstairs, it will present local people with a very competitive offer.

“We are serious about food,” Sands says. “When we talk about fresh we mean fresh.”



Good wholesome fun as revellers at T in the Park drop in at the David Sands marquee. Healthy drinks were also on offer from Robert Wiseman Dairies and Strathmore.