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## Chicago's Protein Bar Restaurant Owner Matt Matros Encourages Healthy Eating Lifestyle

By Shamontiel

Protein shakes, signature healthy food bowls, wraps, salads, multigrain chips and boost energy drinks are served at Protein Bar™, a restaurant across the street from Chicago's own Willis Tower (formerly called the Sears Tower). Big screen televisions line one wall of Protein Bar™, located at 235 South Franklin St. There's free Wifi. And sometimes business executives will come in to have company meetings and presentations while they feast on healthy food. While tourists may not be familiar with Protein Bar™ yet, the business professional crowd flocks there during lunch breaks.

So who's the mastermind behind Protein Bar™, the restaurant that focuses on bringing protein, fiber and less fatty calories to Chicago's diet? Matt Matros, the owner, and the person who opened this restaurant on May 8, 2009. He took a moment out of his busy day after the rush hour crowd to speak to AC Source Writer Shamontiel about his restaurant, his own dietary habits and what led him to becoming an entrepreneur.

**Shamontiel: You're across the street from the Willis Tower. Do you get a lot of tourists?**

**Matt Matros:** I thought I would get more tourists, but it didn't work. Tourists don't like to go to concepts they don't know. They like to go to places they're familiar with, like Applebee's or McDonald's. But mainly it's the [Chicago] professionals. I like catering to our regulars. Once they get their Wrigley Peeled or the Millennium Perk, they'll try it, they'll like it and they'll come back. It becomes a routine.

**S: So what made you want to open a business about protein?**

**MM:** I was heavy growing up. I was the fat kid.

**S: Were you?**

**MM:** (laughs) Yeah. In 2001, about eight years ago, I lost 50 lbs., and it was all in the recipes I've been using here. And I've lost another 10 lbs., since then. I'm down to about 160 lbs. I realized there was no destination for people who seek protein in their food. Some people seek vegetarian food. Some people seek glucose-free food. I seek high protein food, so I did some research to see if there was a market for that, if there was a regular set of people who ate that way. And I found out that there was, liquidated my entire life savings and put it into this, and here I am.

**S: Were you born and raised in Chicago?**

**MM:** No, I'm from Los Angeles, and then I did business school at the University of Michigan.

**S: What made you come to Chicago? Was it because of this restaurant?**

**MM:** No, I was recruited to Chicago from Kraft. I worked at Kraft Foods for the last four years...had this idea, quit my job...my big, cush marketing job, which was easy and comfortable, and took a risk and started this. Now I'm looking to get some more stores and grow it as best I can.

**S: Do you want to grow it more in the Chicago area or nationwide?**

**MM:** I want to start with Chicago 'cause I feel it fits for Chicagoans. Chicago has somewhat of a bad rep' for being an unhealthy city. I don't really think that's the case. While there is a segment of the population that's not as diet-focused, there are still a lot of people who are...especially with the parks and the outdoor spaces that the city has. My target market are urban professionals, and that's all the [Chicago] Loop has. They're willing to pay and come in to order. [Urban professionals] are also a little more educated on health and wellness trends, so they understand the value and importance of having protein in your diet. I love our business crowd. I'd like to actually stay in the loop for a few more stores and then from there, who knows?

**S: Obviously you'll get the vegetarian crowd and the healthy eating crowd like me, how do you get the people who would rather have the fatty, greasy food?**

**MM:** I don't. There are people who come here who want to eat healthy, but on the balance, the people who come here are definitely seeking healthier ways to eat and they know there's a way to eat healthy and [the food] tastes good. That's what I'm trying to get across. Eating healthy doesn't mean eating cardboard and tofu and wheatgrass. There's just food that's prepared a certain way, without certain chemicals and without certain sugar.

**S:** What is the most popular dish here?

**MM:** The most popular thing we sell here is the Wrigley Peeled, which is a high-protein blended drink. It's got peanut butter, banana and chocolate protein. You can mix it with your choice of milk.

**S:** What about food wise?

**MM:** Probably our chili. We sell a ton of chili, and we have three house special chili recipes—the chicken, the beef and then you have the veggie chili. And then we have awesome bowls. We do a ton of vegan and vegetarian dishes. You can build a wrap or you can build a bowl with quinoa, which is a great vegan dish. [Quinoa] is the highest nonmeat protein on the planet. It's from South America. It's what the Incas survived on in Peru. It's a seed and not a grain. It's high protein quality without the carbohydrates that pasta, bread or flour have.

**S:** I've actually never heard of it before today. Who introduced quinoa to you? Do other restaurants carry this?

**MM:** You'll see it in some fine-dining establishments. They'll use it as a side salad. I'm guessing it's going to be one of those items that will become more popular when people realize the benefits of it. Low cost.

**S:** Speaking of price, what is the average cost someone would pay here?

**MM:** The average check is about \$6. Most of our drinks are what we sell.

**S:** They come for the drinks more than the food?

**MM:** Yeah, the drinks really are our signature. That's our bread and butter. They'll get a high protein shake either as a snack or a meal replacement. You'll have that protein shake, which is 300 calories, the good calories and high in protein, and it'll make you feel more satisfied than if you were to have a Jamba Juice or a latte at Starbucks or a candy bar. One thing that customers are really happy about is that we have full nutritional disclosure about everything we sell from the calories, fat, protein grams, the whole nine.

To read a Protein Bar™ restaurant review, [click here](#).

To visit the Protein Bar™'s restaurant's Web site, [click here](#).

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<http://www.chicagonow.com/blogs/message-from-montie/2009/10/protein-bar-chicago-makes-healthy-eating-at-lunch-that-much-easier.html>

<http://www.proteinbarchicago.com/>

[http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/2149559/healthy\\_eating\\_for\\_business\\_travelers.html](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/2149559/healthy_eating_for_business_travelers.html)

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