



## Core Values Key to DIY Dinner Success

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by *RaeAnne Marsh*

Laura Prefling and Sara Hinkel, sisters and partners in the [Dream Dinners](#) franchise in Phoenix — a sort-of kitchen away from home where individuals can prepare a large number of dinners all at one time — have come out of the recession with the opening this month of their third location. The success of their survival Prefling attributes partly to their low-budget, DIY approach to operations — doing the painting and everything else that does not require skilled labor — and partly to staying true to the mission that underlies the Dream Dinners concept.

The business provides customers recipes, fresh ingredients and the space and equipment to prepare the daily dinners for their family that they can freeze at home to be able to easily and quickly serve. Plus there are “finishing touch” items — vegetable side dishes and desserts — that can be added to the order. There is a minimum order requirement of 36 servings, which the sisters feel is part of keeping the lifestyle they believe their service helps promote. “We saw competitors sell individual dinners, but doing onesies and twosies doesn’t really help people against a tight schedule or budget,” Prefling says. The company tag line is “home-made, made easy,” but what especially attracted Prefling and Hinkel to the enterprise was the idea of the importance of sharing a family dinner. “Staying true to the roots of Dream Dinners encompassed keeping the minimum order requirement.”

Each of the sisters’ locations is about 1,200 square feet. They conform to health code regulations, although Prefling admits it posed a learning curve to the health inspectors. “The health department didn’t know what to do with us,” she says, explaining that Dream Dinners is more like a restaurant than a grocery store because of the open food. But the idea is for people to do the actual cooking at home, and cooking is half of the food preparation on which restaurants are inspected. “Now, we don’t have to explain to every health inspector,” Prefling says. “They have become familiar with this concept.”



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