Icebox Cafe relocates, plans airport expansion

When Robert Siegmann opened the Icebox Cafe on Miami Beach’s Lincoln Road, the pedestrian mall was still getting its legs. It wasn’t yet the burgeoning tourist must-do it is today.

Now, 15 years later, the restaurant and bakery has become a staple for locals and visitors alike, who can’t get enough of Siegmann’s savory meals and delicious cakes – plus it has expanded beyond the palm tree-laden street.

Icebox also has a presence at Miami International Airport and Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport.

Siegmann, a former New York caterer who once counted Martha Stewart as a client, is also bidding on locations at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport, Los Angeles International Airport and Chicago O’Hare International Airport.

He is also relocating his Miami Beach restaurant to 1855 Purdy Ave., where Scott Robins has built Sunset Harbour Shops, a commercial center with a parking garage on top.

At 2,700 square feet, the new Icebox will be double the size of the original. It will have a full liquor license and feature an expanded menu, including organic and natural foods. Its planned opening is set for this month.

Siegmann spoke to me about his plans. The following has been edited for clarity and brevity:

SFBJ: How did you decide that your new home was a better location?
Siegmann: Our client base largely consists of locals. Scott Robins’ intention was to fill his development with concepts, which were local and unique, something that appealed to us.

SFBJ: How did you finance the move?
Siegmann: Financing for a sole proprietor is always challenging. The vast majority of restaurants and restaurant groups are made up of multiple owners – investors, partners, etc. Icebox Cafe is unique in this sense, leading to definite advantages and challenges. The greatest challenge is sourcing financing for growth. I have been fortunate to have forged a strong relationship with a bank that supports our model and growth strategy.

SFBJ: Why not Brickell Avenue, downtown Miami or Wynwood – which, like your new neighborhood, are also up and coming?
Siegmann: I’ve scouted out all those locations, and all of them have their pros and cons. Most of the areas that you’ve mentioned don’t capture the local, neighborhood feeling that we were searching for. And many of these neighborhoods are still in the early stage of development. The final outcome and identity of those neighborhoods is yet to be defined.

SFBJ: How did you get the idea to expand to airports?
Siegmann: I felt that there existed a huge void in airport food, especially as airlines started to do away with in-flight services. Most concepts and most airports are managed by master concessionaires, large corporations that manage/operate concepts for airports. It was important for me that, if we were to pursue the airport business, we do it as an independent, wholly owned operation. While this is far more complicated, it does give us control over our product, our staff and service; and, in the end, protects our brand and corporate image.

Winning the first bid at MIA was a huge accomplishment, being the first independently owned and operated concession in the airport.

SFBJ: Did government/small business programs help?
Siegmann: As a small-business owner, I strongly advise everyone to approach the U.S. Small Business Administration for financing opportunities. They do offer financing to food and beverage companies.