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Panera bakes more pay-what-you-want cafes

At least two new cafés will open as part of its effort to help feed the hungry. At the same time, the quick-service restaurant chain is laying plans to expand rapidly in New York City.

Panera Bread, a quick-service restaurant chain expanding in New York City, is planning to open at least two more pay-what-you-want cafés as part of its effort to help feed the hungry.

The concept is simple: Panera lists a suggested price for food, but customers pay what they want. A spokeswoman for Panera said Thursday that the locations will be announced this spring. One café could open by summer, another in the fall and possibly a third later this year.

The Panera spokeswoman says about 15% to 20% pay more, and about the same percent pay less or nothing. She says it's enough for the cafés to essentially break even.

St. Louis-based Panera has such cafés in suburban St. Louis; Portland, Ore.; and Dearborn, Mich.

The only visible difference between them and regular Panera restaurants are signs explaining the concept.

Earlier this month, Panera debuted its first New York City location at 330 Seventh Ave., near West 29th Street. It also plans to open shops near Union Square and in downtown Brooklyn as part of its strategy to open 20 restaurants in the five boroughs.