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NEW YORK BUSINESS

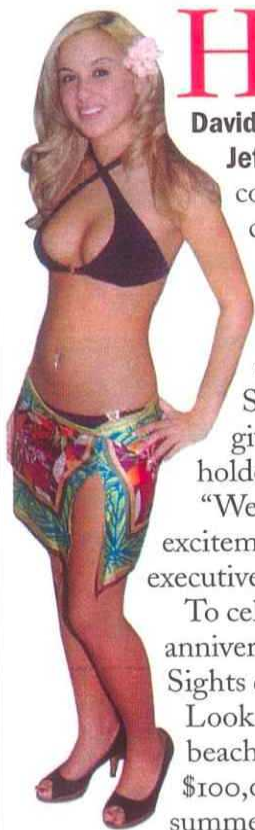
BUSINESS LIVES
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VOL. XXIII, NO. 36 WWW.NEYORKBUSINESS.COM

SEPTEMBER 3-9, 2007 PRICE: \$3.00

Beach blanket babes on a bus



HAWAIIAN TROPIC ZONE, the Times Square eatery owned by the Riese Organization, boasts celebrity chef **David Burke**, decor from renowned architect **Jeffrey Beers** and waitresses—er, “table concierges”—slinking around in sarongs created by **Nicole Miller**. Riese says business is brisk.

Even so, the company will spend \$25,000 on a post-Labor Day promotion, sending eight scantily clad staffers to Penn Station and Grand Central on Sept. 4 to give away 5,000 MetroCards wrapped in holders offering a free drink with any purchase. “We don’t need to do it. It adds to the excitement, the fun,” says **Joe DeNardo**, Riese’s executive vice president of marketing.

To celebrate Hawaiian Tropic Zone’s one-year anniversary in October, the owners will wrap City Sights double-decker buses in ads for the month. Look for bikini babes on-board handing out beach balls and other toys. The price tag? \$100,000. “Hopefully we’ll have an Indian summer,” Mr. DeNardo says.

Book imprint takes off

LITERARY IMPRINT Virgin Books USA is off to a flying start. The new publisher will mark the Sept. 18 publication of its debut title, *The Flawless Skin of Ugly People*, by giving away copies inside the Virgin Atlantic lounges at JFK, Newark and San Francisco international airports.

And at a downtown nightclub party last week marking the start of Virgin America’s New York to Los Angeles service, copies of the novel, by **Doug Crandell**, were in the gift bags.

“This is the first book tour that will be launched simultaneously in the air and on the ground,” says **Ken Siman**, publisher of the imprint, which set up shop at Virgin’s Manhattan headquarters in November.

Focusing on offbeat fiction and nonfiction with a pop culture bent, Virgin Books USA—90% owned by Random House U.K.—will issue about 40 titles this year, including the latest musings from Virgin founder **Richard Branson**.