



Popular Strongsville Rib Burnoff vendor eyes Pearl Road spot for restaurant

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By [Cory Shaffer, Sun News](#)



Visitors to the [Strongsville Rib Burnoff](#) June 21-23 said [Old Carolina Barbecue Company](#) had the best ribs for the third straight year.

If everything goes as planned, Strongsville residents will have permanent access to the Massillon-based ribber in the fall.

Co-founder Brian Bailey said Old-Carolina is looking to add a seventh location in the Strongsville Plaza, 14783 Pearl Road.

"We're happy our first west-side location will be Strongsville," Bailey said. "It's a town we've had so much support from over the past four years."

Bailey said the new space will occupy 3,820 square feet on the first floor of Elevated Fitness, have 80 seats and will be a fast-casual restaurant, meaning diners will order their food, self-serve their drinks, find a seat and servers will bring the food to their table.

The decor will be southern-inspired, with fancy ceiling fans and carved pineapples, a traditional southern symbol of hospitality.

"Old Carolina's not just about the food," Bailey said. "It's about that feeling you get when you're at a restaurant that we're here to take care of you."

While Bailey and Hug got their start selling ribs at barbecue competitions in 2003, Bailey said the goal was always to open a chain of fast-casual restaurants.

"It's kind of a tribute to the roadside barbecue stands in the Carolinas," he said.

Bailey, who was a software salesman in the newspaper industry before succumbing to barbecue, said the idea

for Old Carolina Barbecue Company started when he was in St. Louis.

"I always try the food wherever I traveled," he said. "And I had an epiphany: northeast Ohio didn't have any traditional barbecue joints."

So he teamed up with Hug, who was a manager at a fast-food restaurant, and sold their first rib at the Akron Family Barbecue in 2003.

Since then they've expanded, and entered the Strongsville Rib Burnoff in 2009.

Bailey said traveling to barbecue competitions around the Midwest helped to build the company's brand, not to mention their bank account, so they could open a restaurant.

"We kind of used the rib competitions as a way to build our recognition before we entered a community," he said. "That way people already knew who we were when we opened."

When the Strongsville location opens - construction could begin as early as next month, with plans to open in the fall, Bailey said - residents will be able to try five different sauces, each representing a different region of the Carolinas:

- a western sweet sauce, a traditional barbecue sauce from Western Carolinas;
- a mustard sauce, reminiscent of the southern Carolinas style;
- a vinegar-based, Eastern Carolina barbecue sauce;
- the signature Piedmont 5 sauce, a vinegar and tomato-based barbecue; and
- the Sceamin' Beaver Hot Sauce.

Bailey said a sandwich, with anything from pulled pork to beef brisket to smoked turkey, with a few sides will run \$8-9, while entree platters are \$13.99.

"When we first opened the stand, people would say 'where's your restaurant?' and we'd have to say right here, right now," Bailey said. "But now we'll be able to say 'Oh, it's right on Pearl Road.'"