

BACK YARD BURGER

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BACK YARD BURGER: COME ON OVER

Back Yard Burger expands its U.S. franchise operation to Montgomery, AL

(Montgomery, AL) --- Don't let Jim Fair fool you. He may be six months away from opening his first Back Yard Burger franchise, but he's extremely busy. The former financial advisor and his wife Sheila have just signed an area development agreement with Back Yard Burger to build four stores in the Montgomery, Alabama area.

Headquartered in Memphis, Tennessee, Back Yard Burger offers a premium alternative to the more traditional fast food hamburger. Their one-third pound hamburgers are made with 100 percent Black Angus Beef and charbroiled over an open flame. Back Yard Burgers also offers a unique variety of grilled chicken sandwiches, salads, fries, baked potatoes, chili, hand-dipped shakes and fresh-made cobblers. Average per person bill is around six dollars.

The Fairs' first store will be in an up-scale retail center in Montgomery. With high-income levels and traffic counts, construction begins in October, with the intention of opening in late January or early February.

“Back Yard has agreed to allow us to develop four stores in the next four in a half years,” Jim, 52, says. “The first store will be here in Montgomery. The second store will go to Prattville, which is just north of Montgomery on I-65. It’s a little town that’s really progressive and has a lot of business there. We also want to build in the Auburn area. So our intent is to have two stores in Montgomery, one in Prattville and one in Auburn.”

After spending 16 years as a financial advisor and retirement plan specialist, Fair and his wife began looking into businesses that they could run with their three children: two college-aged kids and a twelve-year-old son. On a company trip a few years ago, the Fairs came across their first Back Yard Burger in Gulfport, Mississippi. After eating there and liking the product, they found another one in Jackson, Mississippi. Realizing the quality of taste and uniqueness of the product, Jim went online and started looking at Back Yard Burger’s information.

“The more we learned, the more comfortable we felt with what we found in Back Yard Burger,” he says. “We wanted to offer something in Montgomery that was unique and different. We wanted to find something that we could all be excited about and that had a good future. And when we made this decision, it was a family decision. We want the kids to be involved as much as they want to be.”

The Fairs signed the development agreement with Back Yard three months to the day Jim sent an e-mail to the founder, Laddie Michaels. Jim, who is a big believer in personalized service, says the company’s Silver Platter Service was a big selling point for him.

“Back Yard has what they call their Silver Platter Service,” he says. “As our guests place their order, they get a number and sit down. When their order is ready, someone brings them their meal on a silver platter. That’s symbolic of from the time that guest gets out of the car, there’s no trash on the parking lot, everything is decent and in order. And when they walk in, they’re greeted with a

smile by someone who looks eye to eye to them. Once they leave that parking lot, we want them to say, 'I enjoyed it. I'm coming back and I'm going to tell others about it.' So I think the Silver Platter Service is the key that will separate us from other quick service restaurants."

While Back Yard Burger's menu is predominantly hamburgers, Jim says it's their variety of hamburgers that will keep customers coming back. Besides its traditional burger, specialty offerings include Mushroom Swiss, Bacon Cheddar, Black Jack (seared in seasoning topped with hot Pepper Jack cheese and Creole mayonnaise) and Miz Grazi (topped with their own proprietary brand of Louisiana hot pepper sauce and grated cheddar cheese). Back Yard also offers four varieties of chicken sandwiches including the Blackened and Hawaiian chicken sandwich. In addition, there's an assortment of salads, three varieties of fries, baked potatoes, chili, hand-dipped shakes and fresh-made cobblers.

"Back Yard will offer something to everyone," he says. "Whether it's a child coming in who buys a kid's meal or an elderly person who comes in for some cobbler, we feel like we got something for all ages."

And even though the Fairs are months away from operation, Jim and his family are happy with their current plans for four stores in the Montgomery area.

"I think Montgomery, Alabama is ready for us," Jim says. "We want to make sure our flagship store really takes off and does well. We want to develop as fast as we can, but we want to do it right. That's what we're going to work toward."

Currently in 17 states, Back Yard Burger's plans to add 23 stores this year in existing states, with three being company-owned. An additional goal is to increase the number of franchised units at 20 percent per year. Focused growth remains in the Southeast, but they are committed to steady growth in the Midwest.