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Local restaurants reap the benefits of high school football

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Roger "Sarge" McDonald talks to Capri Restaurant owner Darrell Givens while he eats breakfast at the restaurant, which is located across from Cartersville

High School. SKIP BUTLER/The Daily Tribune News

Bartow County feels different in the fall, and it's not just the changing temperature.

In the same way the leaves appear to anticipate the transition to bright, rich oranges and yellows, the citizens of the local community seem to sense the arrival of gridiron, tailgates and touchdowns. And when the stadium gates open, fans' wallets do the same. Perhaps none know this better than restaurant owners. Especially when they're right across the street from a school.

"The high school football players will start coming in," said Darrell Givens, owner of Capri Restaurant, a roughly 43-year-old eatery adjacent to Cartersville High School on Church Street.

"The cheerleaders [will come in] ... the students all will start coming in more. The parents will come in for breakfast or lunch. We just have a[n] increase in people. They'll stay around the stadium, especially on a home game, and either paint the field or put signs up. ... They'll just walk over and eat with us."

Givens — a longtime Cartersville football fan who estimates he's missed only six games in 24 years — has owned Capri for 9 1/2 years. During the fall season, his business increases by 20 percent. And his restaurant isn't even open during the games. He's tried to stay open before and said fans usually buy concessions in-game to support the school. But he's totally fine with that; he'd rather be part of the crowd, anyway.

"It's a tradition. [Game attendees] park here at the [buildings next to Capri], and the parking lots just fill up. ... I'll sit in the stands and, where I sit, I can see the restaurant here and I mean, [the] parking lots are covered."

Even though Capri's doors are shut during football games at Weinman



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Stadium, they're wide open the next morning. That's when Givens sees the benefits of his attendance at the competition the night before — during a postgame breakfast breakdown of sorts.

“And really, on Saturday morning after a football game, we get a lot of people that will come in and just want to talk about it because they know I go [to the games],” he said, noting that particular customers will ask him how the team looked and how the game played out.

Even for a restaurant that isn't right next to the nearest high school, the sudden influx of people to the area can be just as beneficial.

“You can tell when it's game night,” said Wesley West, owner of Wes-Man's Restaurant on Highway 411 in White near Cass High School.

“Game night, right before the game, they'll come in and eat.”

That means everyone, including the band members, football players, visiting team fans; you name it. They all gather in the small, cabin-esque culinary hotspot when the bright lights of Friday night fire up. Even on regular weekdays, West noted, the restaurant sees more traffic during the school year as students pour in to get breakfast items such as chicken biscuits. But game nights are a special treat indeed, sometimes turning the restaurant itself into the portrait of a fiery small-town rivalry. West explained what the restaurant looked like on the evening Cass played against Cartersville Aug. 28. While the restaurant was full of supporters for both teams, the sitting arrangements showed a division that was more than apparent.

“It was Cartersville ... ” he said, gesturing to one section of the restaurant.

West's arm shifted through the air as he spoke, pausing once he had rotated it to point in a completely different direction.

“... Cass,” he indicated, motioning to another portion of the building.

West is an official corporate sponsor of the team, and he even hands out gold-and-blue T-shirts to patrons during the season. And he's won the support of the Cass community in the few years since the school moved to Colonel Way off Cass-White Road from its previous location on Grassdale Road. The football team and other student groups involved with it don't forget to grab a bite from Wes-Man's, even when the Colonels aren't playing at home.

"If it's an away game, sometimes I'll cook them hamburgers, and they'll grab a bag and go on the bus," noted West.

While some restaurants enjoy the continued success of their establishments alongside that of their respective school sports clubs, others are trying to do the same. Exactly 16 miles away from Wes-Man's, on East George Street near downtown Adairsville, Community Coffee Shop is attempting to brew up the support of the local football community. When the clock reaches 0:00 at the end of Adairsville High School's next home game against Calhoun — as well as the rest of the season's at-home contests — Tigers fans and any other interested parties will be welcome to the coffee shop's 5th Quarter event. An extension of Living Way Community Center, the coffee shop, which opened during the spring, is intended to become a hangout spot for locals.

"Our hope, I would say it would be two-fold," said owner Jon Spellman. "I am a businessman, and so obviously, one [hope] would be that [5th Quarter] would be well-attended and that it would be profitable. That would be certainly our goal. But secondly ... a second, equally important goal would be that it be a place where people can just come and be here, connect with friends, connect with families, feel that they have a place to just put their feet up.

"There's just no obligation to buy coffee just because they come here," he added. "They may want to just come and hang out and that's fine, too. And they'd be able to come in and talk about the game and

connect and hopefully celebrate a victory. That's what our hope is.”

And Spellman isn't skimping on the variety of available postgame activities or the hours of the shops' operation. Already he has scheduled Bartow County-based musical artist Jac Rip for a performance following AHS' home competition against Gordon Central. He's also working on a trivia night and a potential karaoke event. Spellman said that as long as guests keep coming through the door, he'll stay behind the counter serving up lattes.

“So our plan is to be here as late as we need to be. Our typical Friday night hours would be until 10:30, but we'll be [open] later if people want to come by. As long as people are coming, we'll stay,” he said.

And as long as football exists in Bartow, it seems fall will continue to bring enthusiasm and renewed vigor to restaurants, their patrons and a myriad of eager fans.

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