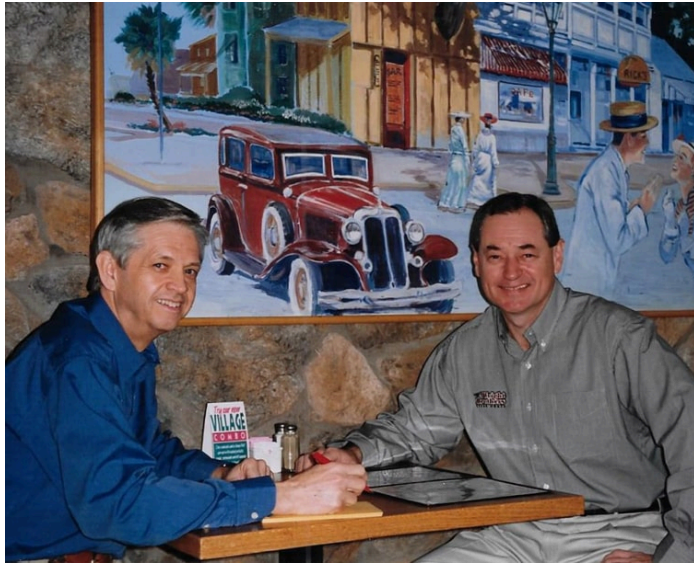




Wayne Bunting (left) and Randy Cox (right) in the 1990s
during the early days of The Village Grill

Photo Courtesy of Randy Cox

*It Takes a Village: Burlington staple restaurant celebrates 40 years of community, food and
family*

By Lyda Cosgrove

For the last 40 years, Randy Cox has woken up every day and thought to himself *what can we do better?*

His employees may call him “relentlessly dissatisfied,” but Cox, the owner and founder of The Village Grill in Burlington, North Carolina, sees each day as a new opportunity to serve his community even better than the day before.

Cox has lived in Alamance County his entire life, starting out in his first restaurant job in 1978 at The Cutting Board. He leveled up to a management position working under Wayne Bunting, who would later become his business partner.

In 1985, he decided to split off and do his own thing. Inspired by the rising popularity of chicken as “the protein of the future,” Cox developed The Village Grill’s signature item — Key West chicken. The white chicken breast in a lemon-lime marinade set the tone for the restaurant’s overall theme — a tropical getaway, also displayed through their palm tree and toucan logo.

“It was tough,” Cox said of the restaurant’s beginnings. “I wasn’t as smart as I thought I was. When you have an established brand, it’s called a three legged stool: brains, money, labor. I was the labor, but I needed the money and the brain.”

Now, in 2025, The Village Grill is celebrating more than four decades years of serving up their signature Key West chicken and fresh lettuce salad bar. They’re celebrating 40 years of the dedicated regulars who get the exact same order every day, 40 years of the chosen family relationships they’ve formed with the employees and 40 years of a successful establishment — so successful that they’re relocating to a bigger, renovated location in the fall.

Of course, 40 years means trials and tribulations for any business, especially in the restaurant industry. But what makes it all worth it? For Cox, his daughter Katherine and long-time manager Carter Honeycutt, the answer is simple: good people.

“I'm a businessman, yes,” Cox said. “You want your own business. You want to make money. That was my motivation. But just going to the dining room, having happy people — that's what it's all about. It's immediate gratitude. If you walk out there and you have happy customers like, man, this is great.”

The Cox's and Honeycutt agree that the Burlington-Alamance County area is an especially unique location with the small town connections, their main customer base being dedicated regulars, contributing to the restaurant's values of consistency and dependability.

“It's nice to have a business that the community likes a lot and calls it their own,” Cox said. “That's very warm, very satisfying to me. In a small town, everybody knows everybody.”

The customer connections aren't the only special relationships formed thanks to The Village Grill. The employees are a family of their own, too. Now-manager Honeycutt started off as a dishwasher and line cook in high school. He went off to college, managed restaurants around the country, then ‘one thing led to another’ and Honeycutt found his way back to North Carolina and got the job as The Village Grill manager, where he's stayed for the last 15 years.

“I've managed restaurants in California, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and this little restaurant in this little small town whoops all of them, smokes them out of the water, as far as sales, as far as execution, as far as organization, as far as everything,” Honeycutt said. “I hug on everybody, they hug on me, it's a big family. People come here for the food, and I think a lot of them come back every day or every other day for the company. It always feels good when you come in.

Somebody knows your name. They know what you like. It's just a warmth that we offer to a lot of people.”

After his business partner and co-owner Wayne Bunting passed away in 2022, Cox was unsure what the future would hold for The Village Grill. Around this same time, his daughter Katherine decided to move back home after college — much to the surprise of Cox and even Katherine herself.

“This was not a part of my plans, when I was thinking career-wise when I was in college, but it's turned into the biggest blessing for me,” Katherine Cox said. “It's very special to get to continue the legacy that my dad has worked so hard to create over the last 40 years. I feel very fortunate to be stepping into a successful business and there's so much I'm learning from him and learning about myself, but also gaining a greater appreciation for the Alamance County community because of how much support and encouragement people have had towards me coming back home.”

It was the help of Katherine that really kickstarted the relocation, Cox says. After COVID changed customer eating habits, leading to increased takeout orders, they began to have issues with parking overflow into the strip mall next door on Huffman Mill Road. The new location on South Church Street will not only have 100 parking spots as opposed to the current 55, but a separate door solely for takeout.

“It is a blessing,” Cox said. “She's doing a great job. She's got a knack for it. I'm real pleased and excited that we're going to be able to carry on.”