



Wade McSwain

Pit Boss BBQ | Hapeville, GA

Wade has been in the restaurant business since 1972, where he worked his first job in his uncle's BBQ restaurant in Chicago. He later moved to Alabama, working for full-service restaurants and steakhouses, until moving to Atlanta where he began managing restaurants. Pit Boss' location has been in Hapeville for awhile, but Wade reopened and rebranded the spot in fall 2008.

Where are you from + what led you to open a business in Hapeville?

After moving to Atlanta, I had the opportunity to take over a previous restaurant's space and took it. My passion has always been in the restaurant industry, and I always strived to own a restaurant. My favorite pastime is making food for others.

Can you tell us a little more about Pit Boss BBQ?

Pit Boss' menu is made completely from scratch - sides, sauces and all. I created my own combination of seasonings and dry rubs for fresh meats, and signature dishes (smoked wings, best bet brisket sandwich, beef brisket) are cooked over a large hickory-oak firepit in the center of the restaurant.

What did opening Pit Boss look like?

The first few months were slow, with only about 20 customers total. My crew and I were completely winging it, and continued to cook each day, focusing on providing fresh meals for our community. Things began picking up by the end of 2008, with 50 to 60 customers each day, and I attribute growth to word-of-mouth. Today, things are much different with about 500 to 600 customers daily.

Did you have any specific goals for Pit Boss before opening? If so, what did that look like, and has it changed along the way?

I never had any specific goals outside of listening to consumers, what they liked and did not like and going from there. The goal all along was to simply feed people meals they enjoyed. I had no idea Pit Boss would grow into the busy restaurant it is today, and I had no idea community members would grow to love it so much. You can sometimes see the heartbreak in a customer's eyes if brisket has sold out for the day.

How do you hope to grow Pit Boss in the future?

I am interested in expanding to more cities - possibly somewhere on the northside of Atlanta or downtown. I'm also interested in manufacturing and selling Pit Boss sauce and dry rubs.

How do you believe Pit Boss contributes to your community?

If someone comes to Pit Boss with a need, I try make sure he can provide an answer. Pit Boss regularly feeds school system employees, the fire department and churches in need. We also partner with purveyors for donated food, if possible.

How does it feel to contribute to the same community you were raised in?

Although I didn't grow up in Atlanta, I still feel a sense of pride when giving back to my community. The restaurant business can be tough, but it's all worthwhile when a customer expresses their gratitude and how much they enjoyed their meal.

What are some challenges you've faced as a business owner? How have you overcome them?

Although "the pit" was built in with the original BBQ restaurant, I decided to keep that aspect of the building in tact, even though it has caught fire twice since opening. One fire nearly burned the entire building down, but luckily firemen on the scene were familiar with the restaurant and were able to extinguish the flames with minimal damage to the kitchen area. We quickly reopened 10 days later with the help of the Hapeville community.

What is your favorite thing about being a part of this community?

My favorite aspect about being a part of the Hapeville community is the gratitude and respect I receive from patrons. They've watched Pit Boss grow over the past 12 years and truly appreciate the hard work it takes, day in and day out, to operate such a busy restaurant.

How did the Pit Boss team navigate the COVID-19 outbreak and Atlanta closures?

During COVID-19 closures, I decided to pause my own paycheck to ensure I could pay my employees. Customer support has gotten us through. We reopened as a to-go stand and continued serving the community.

What is a business accomplishment you're really proud of?

I am very proud of how busy the restaurant is, especially on the weekends. It was awesome to hit the milestone of serving 400+ guests, Thursday through Sunday.

Did you have any mentors or people you admired when starting Pit Boss?

I looked up to my former employer, Charlie. He was kind, giving and easy to work for - the kind of boss you wanted to work hard for.