

The Johnston County food hall announces its first tenant — and it's a big one

By Courtesy of Shake Shack

The Shake Shack Story

The story of Shack, told by Shake Shack founder Danny Meyer, CEO Randy Garutti.

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The future Johnston County food hall has been christened with barbecue.

The [Old North State Food Hall, opening next spring](#) off of Interstate 95 in Selma, named its first tenant Wednesday, adding one of Johnston County's own. The popular Redneck BBQ Lab has signed on as one of the food hall's 10 vendors.

The [Redneck BBQ Lab](#) has become a destination stop for barbecue fans traveling on Interstate 40, serving modern barbecue in a roadside gas station in McGee's Crossroads.

Owned by competition pitmaster Jerry Stephenson, the Redneck BBQ Lab opened in early 2017, serving pulled pork and ribs, but also sliced brisket and smoked and chopped chicken thighs. It has built a following with its burnt ends. More recently he's added pastrami and a pastrami beef rib.

"It might be the most exquisite thing on our menu," Stephenson said of the beef rib.

The new food hall

Continuing the national food hall craze, Old North State is currently renovating a corner of the former JR's Cigars warehouse into a 13,000-square-foot collection of restaurants, plus a 3,000-square-foot craft beer bar.

"We were waiting for the right opportunity, and this came up," Stephenson said. "It felt right, and it seemed right and we thought it was the right thing to do."

Selma-based developer AdVenture Development is behind the food hall, which will be managed by Double Barley Brewing owner Larry Lane. The Old North State organizers promise small, independent restaurants.

The addition of a second Redneck BBQ Lab allows Stephenson to expand his catering operation, he said. He'll build a 4,000-square-foot commissary kitchen in the JR's building.

"Currently we're cooking four days a week, 24/7 and we still can't keep up with demand," Stephenson said.

Seeing and selling barbecue

In the food hall, the Redneck BBQ Lab will have roughly a 300-square-foot stall, which will have small smokers and warming cabinets, plus a hot line of sides and vegetables.

"Barbecue sells when you see it," Stephenson said. "We'll be cooking up front, slicing the brisket in front of you."

The Old North State Food Hall is slated to open in the spring or early summer, developers said. Stephenson said he bought into the food hall concept after visiting one in Atlanta.

"It was in an awkward area, a depressed area and then there's 15,000 people on a Saturday enjoying this space," Stephenson said. "It draws people together. I saw nothing but smiles. ... And I saw it in Johnston County. Our little restaurant draws people from Rocky Mount, Myrtle Beach, Western North Carolina. This is going to draw people."



Drew Jackson writes about restaurants and dining for The News & Observer and The Herald-Sun, covering the food scene in the Triangle and North Carolina.