

DeSoto Times-Tribune

A side of music at future Olive Branch sandwich shop

By BOB BAKKEN Staff Writer Aug 28, 2017 Updated 6 hrs ago



Fabian Nelson, owner of four Memphis-area Potbelly Sandwich Shop franchises, has moved from the medical device sales industry into the new venture. The first of his four locations will open in Olive Branch late this year.

Fabian Nelson promises that when his Potbelly Sandwich Shop in Olive Branch opens near the end of this year, there will come with it a different “vibe” to the location, along with the sandwiches that set the franchise apart from other similar restaurants.

Nelson owns the franchise for at least four restaurants of the Chicago, Ill.-based chain in the Memphis area. Nelson plans to open the first one at 5400 Goodman Road in Olive Branch late this year.

It will be the first Potbelly Sandwich Shop in Mississippi. The closest locations of the franchise to DeSoto County currently are in Nashville, Tenn., Little Rock, Ark. and the St. Louis, Mo. area.

For Nelson, the move to restaurant ownership is a complete turnaround from what he did previously; that of being involved in the medical field. He moved to the Mid-South five years ago from his Louisiana home to be an executive in a medical device company, but now considers this area his home.

“I have walked away from the high-tech field of medical devices to provide toasty sandwiches and see the smiles of faces when I give it to them,” Nelson said. “This is our home. This is our adopted home.”

Part of the reason for the shift, Nelson said, comes after traveling for his previous work and falling in love with the sandwiches he had at a Potbelly Sandwich Shop. Getting into the highly-competitive food industry may be seen as quite a risk, but Nelson said he is sold on what he can bring to Olive Branch and the Mid-South area.

“We offer high-end quality products, hot sandwiches,” Nelson said. “You taste the ingredients, of course, but you also taste the love, if you will, in terms of the connection with the customer. There is a culture in Potbelly that is called 'Customer First,' and that's why it is different in a very un-different market place.” Potbelly Sandwich Shops were originated 40 years ago by Peter Hastings in Chicago, in a location that originally held an antique store.

That store was later sold and the new owner, Bryant Keil, who is now the Founding Chairman of the franchise, expanded it and opened another to where today more than 400 Potbelly Sandwich Shops are located across the country and in some international locations.

In Olive Branch, Nelson plans to bring in more than great food, however. He wants to entertain his customers while they are eating.

"I plan to have Mid-South musicians playing three times a week with live, acoustic music at lunch at my shop in Olive Branch," Nelson said. "I want a place that people can grab and go if they need to, but see when they go in there that there's a different vibe, a different buzz that I saw when I traveled and went to Potbelly shops."

Nelson said by offering live music, he hopes to tap into the talent available and showcase them, with different musicians playing twice a week during the lunch hour and once weekly at dinner.

"In the Mid-South, we have a very vibrant music scene, so I want to showcase some of these rising, up-and-coming musicians in the Mid-South," Nelson said. "I'm looking forward to providing an avenue to do that."

The menu will feature a variety of sandwiches all served hot on regular or multigrain wheat bread and sandwiches can be ordered "thin-cut" style, which is one third of the bread cut out.

Menu items will also include soup, shakes and malts, smoothies and cookies. The live music may be new to the area, but it is featured at many of the Potbelly locations under the brand, especially at lunchtime.

Nelson said he won't be done with just one Potbelly shop, however. While exact locations are yet to be determined, he is confident you will, at some point, see the Potbelly sign among the downtown Memphis offerings in the near future.

"I don't know where my spot is, yet, but I know I want to be part of the renaissance down there," Nelson said. "Whether it is my second or third shop, I

know I'm going to be down there because I want to be a part of it. It is a little risky, but it's going to worth it. I've fallen in love with the area and I'm all in on it."