



Shaq's Big Chicken shooting for growth via franchise expansion

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It's franchise tip-off time for Big Chicken, the fast casual concept created by Shaquille O'Neal with locations open in Los Angeles, Las Vegas and on the Carnival Cruise Ship Mardi Gras. The chain, founded in 2018, has launched a franchising program tailored for skilled restaurant owner/operator groups, O'Neal said in a press release.



"Creating the brand a few years ago and getting the first two restaurants open was just the start. It's time to work with great partners who can bring the brand to life in their communities," said O'Neal, an NBA television analyst and basketball Hall of Famer. "The Big Chicken journey is taking franchise flight and I'm so excited about the team we have in place to help lead the way with me."

Along with O'Neal, the pedigree behind Big Chicken includes:

- Authentic Brands, a brand development, marketing and entertainment company, which owns a portfolio of iconic and world-renowned brands including Sports Illustrated, Elvis Presley and Forever 21.
- JRS Hospitality, a Las Vegas-based events and catering company.

"With the backing of Shaquille, and our ownership team, Big Chicken is already operating with BIGGER capabilities than a start-up would be expected to have, making us beyond ready for franchise expansion," CEO Josh Halpern said in the release. "When Shaquille and I met years ago, we talked about his desire to create a concept rooted in his life, the people in it, and what he personally loves."

The Big Chicken menu fuses O'Neal's home-cooked childhood favorites with flavors crafted by Las Vegas chef and JRS co-owner Matt Silverman.

This is not O'Neal's introduction to restaurant ownership and operations. Shaquille's other business ventures include Papa John's, Krispy Kreme and Five Guys franchise ownership.

"The menu captures favorites from my childhood," said O'Neal. "We have sandwiches named after people important to me like my Uncle Jerome, my friend Chicago, and even recipes inspired by my mom's cooking from when I was a kid."

In addition to its existing locations, Big Chicken has seven restaurants in its development pipeline, including units setting sail soon on two more Carnival Cruise ships. The brand also has plans to open restaurants in sporting arenas — Climate Pledge Arena in Seattle, UBS Arena in New York and the Moody Center in Austin. Current franchise growth plans include key U.S. metropolitan markets and select countries.

Link to coverage: <https://bit.ly/3yU44an>