

“Once we heard about it, we started looking at the menu and realized that they’re not a jack of all trades, but they’re a master of one. They just make the chicken and make it perfect. Perfect the one thing that you’re really good at and that was the real draw for us,” he said.

The same investment group currently holds the franchises for 16 Five Guys restaurants in Florida including those in Lake and Seminole Counties and the northern half of Orange County.

The Dave’s menu is simple, chicken tenders either by themselves or on a bun at various spice levels. The concept is based on Nashville Hot Chicken, which is all about heat.

The Dave's Hot Chicken menu focuses on Nashville-style fried chicken tenders and sliders with a variety of sides. (Handout)

The first Dave’s Hot Chicken opened as a pop-up in a Los Angeles parking lot in 2017. Franchises began in 2019 and currently, there are 21 open and operating restaurants.

Several celebrities including Drake, former California First Lady Maria Shriver, Red Sox owner Tom Werner, actor Samuel L. Jackson, and Good Morning America anchor and retired NFL player Michael Strahan are brand investors.

The first Florida location will be in part of what was the former Crisper’s in Waterford Lakes Town Center and construction should begin in mid-January with plans to open the restaurant by mid-April.

That particular shopping center interested Strahm because of its track record with new restaurant concepts and high energy.

“We wanted the first [Dave’s Hot Chicken] to be in a major shopping center like Waterford Lakes. I think if we can make it there, then then the rest of Orlando will really embrace Dave’s,” he said, adding he jumped on leasing the center’s one available restaurant space. “Every time I’ve gone there, it seems like the restaurants are booming and there’s high energy in and around that.”

Strahm told **GrowthSpotter** a second lease is in process for another location in Altamonte Springs, but everything isn’t signed just yet.

The investors are on the hunt for other viable locations with at least 2,500 square feet.

“We prefer a drive-through and given that we are in the restaurant business, we can get a feel for how other concepts are doing around it,” he said. “At the end of the day, it’s just a gut feeling. You collect as much information as you can, but then you have to say yea or nay.”

Each location will have a unique look and feel.

“We have a graffiti artist that comes in and spends some time in and around where the store is going to be. In a day or two, they come back and do a spray paint [art piece] and kind of incorporate some of the local history into it. It’s not your typical cookie-cutter franchise,” Strahm said, adding the location in Naperville, Illinois, has a Dave’s hot chicken dressed up like Al Capone. “We fly them out to every new store and I’m curious to see what they do with Orlando.”

While Strahm said the current workforce shortage gives him some hesitation about bringing a new restaurant concept into the area, he is not too worried.

“At the end of the day, if we can find good people and treat them well, we want them to embrace us just like we want to embrace them. We’ve been around restaurants enough to know what works and what doesn’t work. A high energy, simple menu, and taking care of your key people has really served us well.”

As for the food itself, Strahm says there is a level of spice for everyone.

“We have mild, medium, hot, very hot, and the top one is reaper, which I admit I haven’t tried yet. I will eventually, but it might be a long time. It seems pretty hot to me. Once we get one open and I am there on a daily basis, I’ll have to try it once.”