

# FOCAL POINT

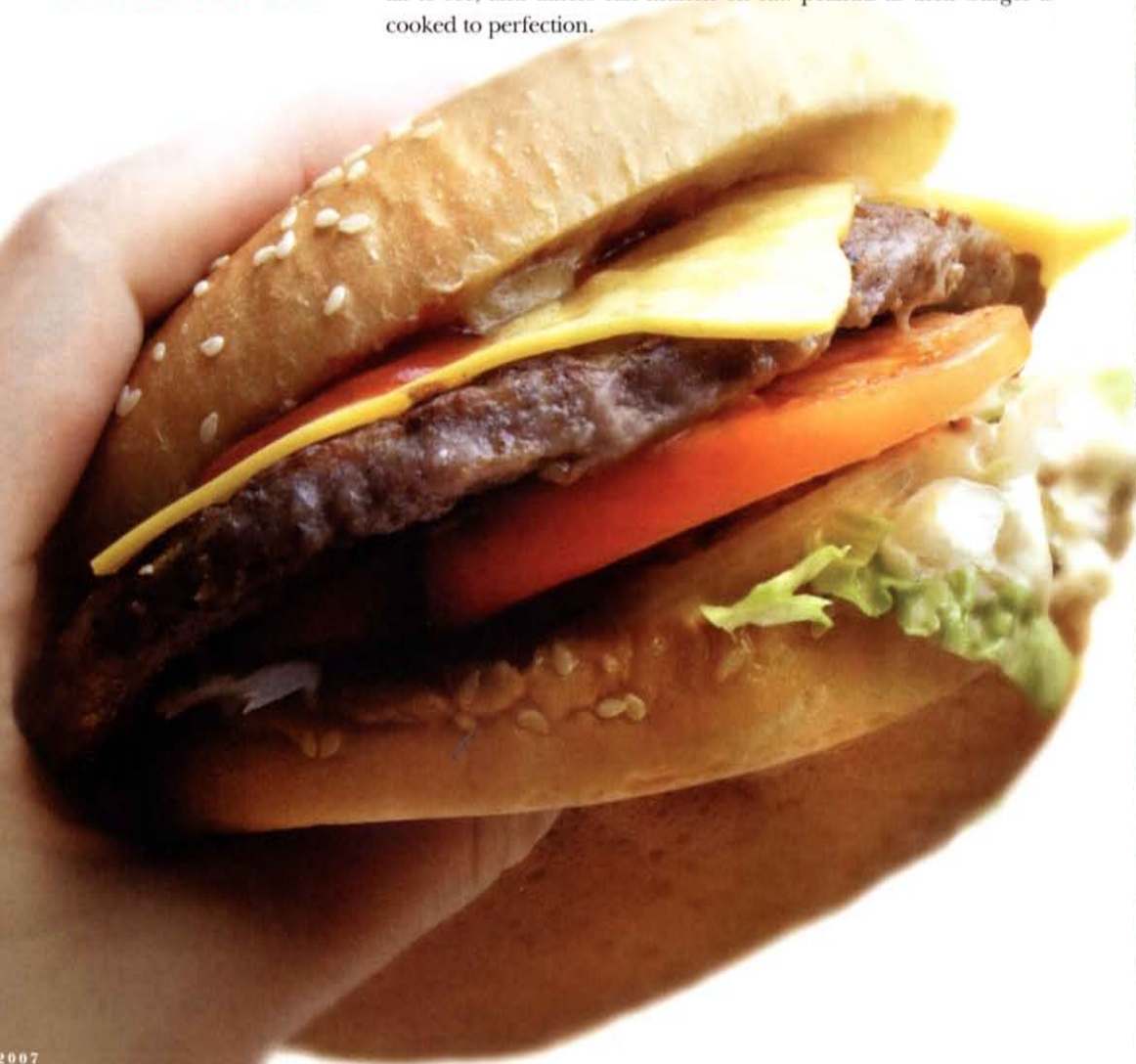
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## Famous Burgers Come to Cobb

By Laura Newsome

**T**hey might not look like much, but those ordinary brown bags from Five Guys Burgers and Fries are highly coveted commodities among burger connoisseurs. Inside every signature bag is a freshly handcrafted burger, hot dog or batch of french fries, courtesy of the friendly burger specialists at Five Guys. Whether layered with cheese or drenched "all the way" with toppings, the company is remaking the classic American burger and the business model to match. This franchise has made its way to Cobb, and burger fans are salivating.

At Five Guys, the burger is the star. The restaurant's stark red and white walls are lined with sacks of fresh potatoes waiting to be peeled, and accolades declaring that Five Guys Famous Burgers and Fries are the "Willy Wonkas of burgercraft." Each meal is cooked to order for all to see, and diners can munch on raw peanuts as their burger is cooked to perfection.



The genesis of Five Guys has become legend in the restaurant industry. Upon their graduation from high school, Jerry Murrell made his five sons an offer they couldn't refuse. He offered them a handsome sum of money with one simple request—they could either invest it in a college education or open a family business. The brothers chose to eschew the world of textbooks in favor of something they really loved—burgers and fries.

The five Murrell brothers opened their first Five Guys Famous Burgers and Fries in their hometown of Arlington Va., in 1986. The boys used their money wisely, investing in a simple concept that would come to define their success—serving up the freshest and most flavorful burgers possible. "The whole Murrell family became involved over the next 15 years," says Molly Catalano, public relations manager for Five Guys. "They built a cult following in the D.C. metro area, and really saw the potential for growth."

After opening five successful stores on their own, the Murrell family took the plunge and opened up all of D.C., Maryland and Virginia to Five Guys franchising. "They sold out the entire territory within a year," Catalano says. As word of Five Guys' legendary burgers traveled along the East Coast, franchises began popping up all over the Eastern seaboard. "We are slowly adding territory all along the East Coast, as far west as Tennessee and from New York to Florida," Catalano says. "Currently we have 146 stores open, and in the next year we will probably open 75 more. We sold the rights to open 1,200 stores in the next eight years or so."

Cobb County resident Nikos Nicholas recently joined the Five Guys franchise team, opening his first Five Guys restaurant last July on Cobb Parkway in Acworth. Inspired by his mother's 35 years of experience owning and operating a Greek restaurant in Virginia, Nicholas, his mom Marianna and his close friend Tony Fratoe created MTN Enterprises, with the express purpose of opening Five Guys restaurants in the Atlanta area. "I love it here in Atlanta; it was a little bit of a culture shock but the people are amazing, the weather is great, and there is a lot of Southern hospitality." With their first Five Guys successfully off the ground at the Shoppes of Acworth, MTN is preparing to open another store in Cobb County at the corner of Chastain and Busby near Kennesaw State University. "Tony and I grew up eating Five Guys [in Virginia] since the 8th or 9th grade, so we really have a passion for the product and we can be truthful when we say we really love it," Nicholas says.

Another entrepreneur making a Five Guys foray into the Cobb County market is Columbus Vines, co-owner of Atlanta's Best Burgers LLC. Vines celebrated a successful opening of his Five Guys franchise along the East-West Connector in Austell last October, after a year of preparations. A former regional

vice president of Starbucks and Burger King, Vines had extensive experience selling franchises and knew a good business buy when he saw one. "I spent a year touring and looking at stores and talking to franchise owners," he says. "I traveled up and down the East Coast and finally decided that starting a Five Guys was the right thing to do."

Sold on Five Guys, Vines immediately contacted company headquarters. "You meet with a few people and they decide whether they want to bring you on board," he says. "They do a deep background check and try to determine if you have the experience and know-how to own and operate a prospective franchise." Atlanta's Best Burgers LLC has an ambitious future that includes opening 20 Five Guys stores concentrated on the west side of I-75, with its second store scheduled to open in less than six weeks off of I-285 in Atlanta. In addition to the two stores already opened by Nicholas and Vines, metro Atlanta is now home to 10 other Five Guys franchises located throughout the city.

"Atlanta is probably our largest growth market right now," Catalano says. "Franchises are opening up all over Atlanta, and we're fitting in quite well. There's a lot of competition, but I think we're finding our niche." Although Five Guys has recently opened up the entire country to franchising, Atlanta's pro business atmosphere and bubbling population provide the perfect atmosphere for a fresh new franchise. "So far Atlanta has been really receptive," Vines says. "The problem here is that there aren't enough stores, but we're getting there and building awareness of the brand. Atlanta is probably one of the best restaurant markets in the world, with more diversity than almost any other city except maybe New York and L.A."

With more than 30 years of restaurant experience, Vines acknowledges that nobody does it like Five Guys. "For some reason, Five Guys brings out the best employees in the business—the right attitudes and the right work ethic, and I

