

Sibling entrepreneurs take over D'bo's on Malco Crossing in franchise deal

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"Being born and raised Memphians, hot wings is one of the things that's almost a family tradition," said Ross Williams of A.R. Williams Hospitality.

A.R. Williams Hospitality, which was co-founded by Ross' sister Ashlei, recently bought a D'Bo's Daiquiris Wings & Seafood franchise, taking over the location at 7050 Malco Crossing.

It's more than a family tradition, it's family connections.

Entrepreneurial families

D'bo's was originally founded by David and Leticia Boyd in 1990. The Boyds and the Williamses go way back.

Cheryl Ross-Williams, Ross and Ashlei's mother said, "David Boyd and I go back to 1974 when we started at Hamilton High School together."

Boyd eventually attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, and Ross-Williams went to Spelman College. Even back then, she recognized Boyd's entrepreneurial spirit.

"He always tried out small event venues and other ventures, even in college," she said. "He's always been a person that, I would say, counted his money extremely well and became an expert on not only how to acquire money but also how to invest money."

The families remained close when both Boyd and Ross-Williams returned to Memphis. The Boyds' and the Williamses' children were close in age, and Ross Williams and the Boyds' youngest son were college roommates.

Ashlei Williams said that she had kept her eye on the Boyds and saw the Boyds' middle son Julian had gotten into the franchise side of the business. So, in 2020, she reached out to him and, after a year, had a deal. On April 11, they officially took over the spot in Southeast Memphis.

Ashlei and Ross Williams are both entrepreneurs. Their father David Williams has a long background in the restaurant and hospitality industry. He worked in concessions at the Memphis International Airport, for TGI Fridays, and for DoubleTree, Sheraton, and Marriott hotels. It was under his influence, they said, that they decided to try their hand at it.

"My wife, and I joke about this, but we've always dreamed about the possibility, when we retire, of working with [our children]," said David

Williams. "It's gone a little past that. We're working for our children."

David Williams will serve as the operating manager for the venture.

"I'm going to go in and try to work with them, and in some instances, work ahead of them to try to see what we can do to enhance the exceptional staff that we have," David Williams explained.

Brand repetition

David Boyd's original vision was to have his two sons run locations, and then he would retire to an island and drink "umbrella drinks." He then realized the future of the restaurant lay in franchising, which is how the Williams siblings came to the Malco Crossing location.

"Originally, we acquired franchise rights for a brand new location," said Ross Williams. "He told us, specifically, he had several stores laid out for his kids. His sons have now decided to still join the family [business], but in a more corporate manner."

Ashlei and Ross Williams have since realized that taking over the Malco Crossing spot has worked in their favor. They get the advantage of running a business that's been open for 30 years and has a seasoned staff.

Before going out on their own, the siblings were trained — everything from front of the house to how to fry the chicken.

"We're literally taking whatever is thrown at us every day," Ashlei Williams said. "The storms we had last week resulted in power outages. We're holding cell phone lights up and still kept going. We didn't close last week."

Neither Ashlei or Ross Williams has restaurant experience, but they learned through training that repetition is key.

"The way it was explained to us by Julian is not to be intimidated if you're interested as a franchisee because their processes are streamlined and simplified," Ashlei Williams said. "It really is about repetition. That's coming from Ross, who was in finance, and I was in marketing."

Ashlei and Ross Williams founded A.R. Williams Hospitality about two years ago. They see the D'bo's as a jumping off point for other ventures. And, down the line, they hope to open more locations of D'bo's.

"We definitely are prioritizing getting everything right [with this location]," Ross Williams said. "But we do have dreams, of course, to expand with the brand."

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A.R. WILLIAMS HOSPITALITY
Ashlei and Ross Williams of A.R. Williams Hospitality