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## Back in Blount



Special to The Daily Times

Bojangles' plans to open 10 to 15 new locations, similar to the one in this company photo, in Blount and Knox counties with the help of Maryville native Edward McCammon.

## Bojangles' plans return to county

By Rick Laney

of The Daily Times Staff

In recent years, Bojangles' chicken restaurants have slowly disappeared from the local landscape. Now, the Charlotte, N.C.-based chain is coming back in a big way with plans to open up to 15 new locations in Blount and Knox counties.

Maryville native Edward McCammon is the driving force behind the popular restaurant chain's return to Blount County. McCammon, whose company operates 32 Arby's restaurants in Western North Carolina, is now the local franchise-holder for Bojangles'.

"This is like coming home for me," McCammon said. "We're going to put 10 to 15 new Bojangles' restaurants in over the next five to 10 years — and Maryville is at the top of our list.

"I was born and raised there and I'm excited about coming back."

Bojangles' Cajun-style chicken, dirty rice, Cajun pintos and made-from-scratch buttermilk biscuits would seem like a perfect combination for a restaurant in East Tennessee. Although most of the Knox and Blount County Bojangles' did a respectable amount of business, the company closed more restaurants than it opened in the area over the past 15 years.

"We left for the wrong reasons and now

we're coming back," said Chris Bailey, director of franchise development for Bojangles'.

"Bojangles' was owned by venture capital groups and investment people. The chain grew rapidly in the late 1980s, but the restaurant support structure wasn't there.

"In some situations, the restaurant property was more valuable to them than the restaurant itself.

"Joe Drury acquired Bojangles, and he has decades of experience in the restaurant business.

"We're at an all-time high right now in Bojangles' history."

McCammon said the company's new privately held ownership ushered in a dramatic change in direction for the Bojangles' brand.

"The company has a new philosophy, a new image and new design," McCammon said. "It's exciting to be a part of it."

Jack Fulk and Richard Thomas started Bojangles' in Charlotte in 1977. Their plan was to create a restaurant with "spicy, distinctive food, wholesome high-quality products in a fast and friendly environment."

The restaurant had a breakfast, lunch and dinner menu from the beginning.

"We take it for granted because we were

a three-meal restaurant to begin with," Bailey said. "But other restaurants — even established chains — are still struggling to get there."

With nearly 400 restaurants in 11 states and three countries, Bojangles' is now pushing franchise agreements in targeted areas, including Blount County.

In 1978, just one year after the business opened, Bojangles' began franchising. Today, the company has 236 franchised and 145 corporate-owned locations.

McCammon's current company, The Winning Team Inc., started in 1988, at that time consisting of 13 existing Arby's restaurants. Today, it is one of the largest Arby's franchise companies in the nation.

McCammon will draw on his background with The Winning Team as he launches his new company, McBoJo LLC, to open new Bojangles' restaurants in Blount and Knox counties.

"In recent years, we've received e-mails, letters and phone calls from Maryville, Alcoa, Rockford, and Knoxville," Bailey said.

"People said, 'We love your food and we love your restaurant — where did you go?'"

"There's a devoted customer base for Bojangles' in that area, and we're looking forward to coming back."