

# King's continues expansion

The historic sandwich shop will debut a new menu with increased vegetarian options

By Leslie Ann Blake  
UNC staff writer

When King's Sandwich Shop first opened in 1942, its only vegetarian option was a grilled cheese.

Though the menu has expanded, many things the original customers admired about the shop have stayed the same, current owner T.J. McDermott said.

"This isn't any other place," McDermott said. "It's King's, an honest piece of the past."

McDermott bought the historic shop in 2010 after it shut down in 2007. Located at the corner of West Geer and Foster streets in downtown Durham, the shop is known for its hot dogs, hamburgers, french fries and milkshakes. The shop already offers a larger menu than the original, and it will soon expand again.

When McDermott reopened the shop he wanted to include more than the original staples, particularly vegetarian options. He added a black bean burger and a vegetarian organic carrot hot dog.

"The organic hot dog was my little brainstorm," said McDermott. "One night I was leaning against my refrigerator chewing on a carrot, and I was like, 'Oh God, this stinks.'"

McDermott, whose wife was a vegetarian for several years, said that he wanted everyone to be able to eat at King's.

"We see people here from all walks of life, all races, all socioeconomic backgrounds," McDermott said.

"Some people look at vegetarians as finicky eaters, but they've made a hard decision and should stick to it," he said.

Marie Garlock, a vegetarian who frequents King's, said the black bean burger is "the best in town."

Andy Maynard, who is not a vegetarian, said a vegetarian friend recommended the black bean burger, and he has eaten it regularly ever since.

"I just have a black bean burger, and life is good," he said.

The original vegetarian option, the "Hot Cheese," is still a popular choice.

Earlene Roberts of Durham brought her grandson, 5-year-old Brayden, who ordered the Hot Cheese.



Owner T.J. McDermott holds the new menu for King's Sandwich Shop, which will now open half an hour earlier. (Staff photo by Leslie Ann Blake)

"I like this grilled cheese," he said.

"He's real picky about his grilled cheeses," added his grandmother, "but he tore this one apart."

Vegetarians are not the only ones who can expect more options, McDermott said.

The expanded menu will include items that have been popular daily specials in the past, said McDermott. Among these are the po'boy sandwich and a blue cheese, bacon-encrusted burger, perfected by Chef Mark Smith.

Britt and Donald Woolley, who come every Saturday, are thankful to see the blue cheese burger become a permanent option.

"There's more variety than there has been," Britt said of the menu.

No matter how much the menu expands, McDermott said he wants to capture the atmosphere of the original King's that made it iconic.

"The atmosphere is wonderful," said Kenric Gillespie, a first-time customer. "The service is wonderful."

Roberta Woods of Chapel Hill said the restaurant makes her feel like family. "What's nice about this place is that they really make an effort to know your name and your order."

Another King's tradition that McDermott said he hopes to keep alive is the freshness of the food.

"People think we're fast food, but it takes a minute to make our burgers," McDermott said. "Everything is fresh and served to order."

The hamburger patties, made of 100 percent pure beef, are hand-patted every day, McDermott said.

Maynard said he can taste the difference. "If there's not love in the food, you can tell," he said. "And there's love in this food."

McDermott said also he plans to expand the restaurant physically. A larger patio is in the works, as well as a catering service and later weekend hours.

For now, McDermott said stories from past customers remind him daily of the shop's importance to Durham.

"People wanna see this place running," he said. "I got a real responsibility."

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

— King's only accepts cash. It is open Monday through Saturday from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

— King's is located at 701 Foster St. in Durham