

This Was Printed From Washington Business Journal

D.C. restaurants jump on BBQ bandwagon

Premium content from Washington Business Journal - by Missy Frederick

Date: Friday, March 11, 2011, 6:00am EST

Related:

[Retailing & Restaurants](#)

D.C.'s most iconic dish, the half-smoke, may sound, well, smoky, but it's actually a grilled sausage. When it comes to barbecue, the Washington area isn't exactly bursting with restaurants that can boast of serving the best the country has to offer in ribs, brisket and pork shoulders.

Give the region a year or two. Barbecue has officially become a trend on local restaurant menus.

In the next month or so, two highly anticipated barbecue restaurants will open: Pork Barrel BBQ in Alexandria's Del Ray neighborhood, and D.C.'s Hill Country, which serves Texas-style barbecue by way of New York. Both are longtime projects whose openings were postponed because of construction delays. Hill Country will serve its first dinners March 12 after signing a lease in 2009.

Those two restaurants join other recent additions, including Virginia's Moley Brothers Q-Pit, D.C. food truck Porc Mobile and old stalwarts such as Arlington-based [Red Hot & Blue](#), which has expanded nationally.

Other competitors are on the way. One is Virgil's Real Barbecue, a New York-based chain from the restaurant company that is behind Carmine's, whose owners are hunting for space in Penn Quarter.

Jeffrey Bank, CEO of The Alicart Restaurant Group, which operates Virgil's, had always intended to bring both concepts to Washington, but when Carmine's took off as well as it did in its 700-seat restaurant, Bank decided to rethink his size plan for Virgil's after almost signing a lease in Penn Quarter. He is now on the hunt for a bigger space.

"It's a happy problem to have," he said.

Even before the recent barbecue boom, D.C. was not entirely lacking in barbecue options — with operators such as Old Glory and Rocklands in the genre — but it has never had a strong reputation for the cuisine.

"Being one of the first in the D.C. market, we had to blaze a trail," said **Randy McCann**, who handles real estate for Red Hot & Blue, which opened its first location in Arlington in the 1980s and has grown to more than 25 restaurants nationwide.

McCann credits the rising popularity of barbecue to the national trend of comfort food, and thinks much of the demand locally comes from displaced Southerners.

The low price of barbecue's meals doesn't hurt in a down economy.

Barbecue purveyors have seen their business take off quickly in other cities, and D.C. seems the inevitable next step.

Hill Country's **Marc Glosserman** said the barbecue boom in New York started in the early 2000s when high-end chefs made the cuisine respectable. Porc Mobile's **Josh Saltzman** saw a similar trend in his native Chicago.

Over the past year or so, D.C. has witnessed a surge of regional food restaurants, whether it be Philly Cheesesteaks, New England Lobster Rolls or New York transplants like Hill Country and Virgil's.