



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 14, 2020

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**THE PRIME SMOKEHOUSE, THE REGION'S MOST ACCLAIMED EATERY,
IS EXPANDING AND RELOCATING TO ROCKY MOUNT MILLS**

*Award-Winning, Nationally Recognized Restaurant to Double in Size,
Join Vibrant Community in Celebrated Redevelopment Project*

ROCKY MOUNT, NC – The Prime Smokehouse: Barbecue & Beyond, which has seen its downtown business explode in recent years, is moving to a location in Rocky Mount Mills that doubles its current capacity. The move this summer will allow the award-winning restaurant to accommodate twice as many patrons as it greatly expands its menu and presents live entertainment and special events.

The new location will be the first restaurant inside the expansive main mill building at Rocky Mount Mills' 82-acre campus on Falls Road. The new Prime Smokehouse is more than 7,300 square feet and will seat approximately 230 people, in addition to another 25 to 30 outside for riverside dining, and will also include an expansive gourmet kitchen as well as a specially curated bar featuring craft beers and sommelier-selected wines. Prime Smokehouse currently operates in a 3,500-square-foot renovated building on East Thomas Street in downtown Rocky Mount, seating roughly 100 customers, including a dozen at the bar.

“Anybody who’s visited our restaurant, especially on a busy weekend, understands our dilemma when it comes to space,” said Chef and owner Ed Wiley III. “We’ve been

bulging at the seams for quite a while, and nothing hurts more than turning away patrons because we've got nowhere to put them.”

Wiley said that city officials had been working with him for at least a couple years to find a bigger location in the downtown area when the opportunity arose to take up residency at the Mills. According to Wiley, not only would a larger space mean more seats, but the enhanced kitchen would allow the business to expand its catering and online, cross-country barbecue sales. The design also enables Prime to reintroduce occasional musical performances, which was part of its offerings when it first arrived in Rocky Mount about seven years ago.

“We are delighted to welcome Prime Smokehouse to our ever-evolving campus, “ said Matt Honeycutt, Real Estate Development Manager at Rocky Mount Mills. “Their barbecue restaurant is a great addition to the many eating and drinking options we have on site, and we look forward to a great partnership.”

In 2013, after visiting The Prime Smokehouse in Raleigh for one of its highly touted jazz dinner shows, Rocky Mount’s then-City Manager Charles Penny urged the restaurant to move to his town. The city had invested millions of dollars in streetscapes and the renovation of several historic buildings, and Penny was hoping Prime would help generate traffic downtown. Wiley describes Penny as a visionary who helped create a climate in which his business has prospered, but he notes that Rochelle Small-Toney, the current city manager, picked up where the previous manager left off.

“We have loved being in downtown Rocky Mount. We’re right next to the beautiful new Event Center, and there are so many amazing things going on all around the area, so naturally, moving has left us with feelings of ambivalence,” Wiley said. “But, at the same time, we see ourselves entering an exciting new chapter. We’re going from one great landlord – the City of Rocky Mount – to another, Rocky Mount Mills.”

Said Small-Toney: "We have been very fortunate to have The Prime Smokehouse operate in downtown Rocky Mount since 2013, and I am pleased that the city's facility served as a place where Ed and his wife and co-owner Yalem Kiros grew a business that is renowned in the restaurant world. Their presence drew many visitors and inspired others to invest in downtown Rocky Mount. While they will be missed downtown, this relocation allows The Prime Smokehouse to remain in our community and move to a facility that provides the expansion the company indicates it needs."

The Prime Smokehouse’s acclaimed cuisine has been recognized by such national media outlets as Travel + Leisure, which ranked its macaroni and cheese among “America’s best,” as well as PBS, Our State magazine and The Washington Post. In 2018, the North Carolina Commerce Department acknowledged the Prime Smokehouse and its owners by naming them North Carolina Main Street Champions “for their commitment to downtown improvements and strong communities.”

Kiros emphasized that despite Prime Smokehouse's move she and her husband will always be a fixture in downtown Rocky Mount. In May, she opened a second business, NABS (Never A Better Sandwich) Deli and Coffee Shop, at 219 NE Main Street, about a two-minute walk from the Smokehouse.

"For the past several years, we have been courted by many other cities to relocate our business," she said, "but we have fallen in love with Rocky Mount, with our loyal customers, and with our city officials and other business leaders – all of whom have collectively become our personal friends. We believe it is our responsibility to stay and do all we can to help make our community better, and that includes our unbending commitment to continuing to support the ongoing revitalization of downtown."

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