

2021 fast casual
TOP 100
MOVERS & SHAKERS

Innovative restaurant brands and executives shaping the fast casual segment



SPONSORED BY **givex[®]**

21. STARBIRD

The California-based chain posted same-store positive comp sales of 37% in 2020 and launched two virtual brands (Starbird Salads and Starbird Bowls), one brick-and-mortar location in Campbell, California, and a virtual kitchen in Oakland. It also raised over **\$4 million** in investment capital to continue its growth.

With the help of the surrounding local community, Starbird was able to send over 3,500 meals to Bay-area frontline health-care workers. The chain also matched every \$10 meal donation made on its online ordering platforms to help fuel those on the frontlines.

Throughout the year, the brand raised wages for hourly employees, allowed an extra free meal for employees to take home to their families, and launched its Employee Enrichment Program. This includes the Language Learning Program and the Starbird Educational Fund, which helps employees with tuition assistance.

22. RISE SOUTHERN BISCUITS AND RIGHTEOUS CHICKEN

Rise Southern Biscuits and Righteous Chicken went through a total brand revamp over the last year. Since first opening as a single storefront in 2012 in Durham, North Carolina, **Rise** has continued to expand across six states. In 2020, sales were up more than 50% from last year, and profits were up more than 30%.

At the beginning of COVID-19, the chain, which signed a five-unit deal this



year, scaled back on startup costs and operation costs, minimized its footprint, reduced staffing and equipment needs, and focused on creating a menu that was consistent at all locations.

Rise was ahead of the pandemic, having already embraced technology before shutdowns made them a must for restaurant survival. For example, it was already using ordering kiosks, a mobile app, third-party delivery, food lockers and heated shelving units for fast and contactless pickup. Because of these factors, Rise did not need to add or change any of its service models during the pandemic.

23. JERSEY MIKE'S

Despite the pandemic, Jersey Mike's reported double-digit same-store sales increases in 2020. At the same time, the New Jersey-based brand continued with retrofits across the country, adding operational improvements, including a second make line to



accommodate heavier digital orders. Just as important was looking at how the brand could help its communities. The brand was determined to fulfill its mission statement: "Giving... Making a Difference in Someone's Life."

To provide financial relief for its customers, Jersey Mike's offered several promotions for 50% and 25% off subs, as well as free delivery services through its online ordering app during the pandemic.

Growth continued in 2020, with the opening of 210 stores, up from 181 in 2019. Jersey Mike's, which launched the Coach Rod Smith Ownership Program to give managers the opportunity to become store owners with financial and training support, expects to continue its smart growth, identifying and recruiting franchisees that are passionate about the Jersey Mike's brand.

The company expects to open more than 200 locations from coast to coast, including with non-traditional locations such as universities and military bases, bringing total locations to more than 1,850 nationwide.

24. PENN STATION

2020 was an anniversary year for Ohio-based **Penn Station**, marking 35 years in business, and the brand celebrated with innovation. It created PS 2020, a new restaurant design and revised menu, which added cold sandwiches, along with a multigrain bread option. It also highlighted wraps and salads.

Launched systemwide in March 2020, new items proved popular with