

Published: Dec 04, 2008 12:30 AM

Modified: Dec 04, 2008 02:45 AM



Hall of Fame coach Don Shula and son Dave have opened a 347 Grill in Chapel Hill.
Photo Courtesy of Donshula.Com

Shula talks food and Mean Joe Greene

[Comment on this story](#)

Don Shula, whose 347 victories as coach of the Baltimore Colts and Miami Dolphins is an NFL record, has extended his winning streak to the restaurant business.

Shula's 347 Grill, which celebrated its grand opening Wednesday in Chapel Hill, is the 29th restaurant in the Shula Steak Houses chain. The 347 Grill is one of four concepts operated by the chain, which traces its roots to a restaurant that the Hall of Fame coach, now 78, opened in 1989.

Today, the chain is run by Shula's son, Dave Shula, 49, who also followed his father's footsteps in the NFL. His 15 years as an NFL coach included a stint as the head coach of the Cincinnati Bengals.

Staff writer David Ranii talked to the Shulas at their restaurant, which is in the Sheraton on Europa Drive. Some highlights:

* On the chain's initial restaurant: "In the first year, [business] jumped about four times what it was doing before I put my name on it," said Don Shula. "All of a sudden, I decided this wasn't a bad deal."

* Philosophy: "The name might bring you in, but the dining experience is what is going to bring you back," said Don Shula.

* On opening during a recession: The chain, which plans to open three restaurants next year, works on a franchise model and operates predominantly in hotels. "These are deals we've had in the works for a long time," said Dave Shula. "A full-service hotel is going to have a restaurant that's going to be open anyway. ... They have chosen to go with us to have a branded restaurant."

* On locating in Chapel Hill: The owner of the Sheraton, The Soleil Group of Raleigh, contacted the chain. That said, the Shulas like the market. The local economy, said Dave Shula, "hasn't sunk as low as a lot of places. ... The hotel will attract customers that fit our demographic." That includes "business travelers that will use their expense accounts [to] entertain customers, close business deals, use one of our private dining rooms for a function."

* The recession's impact: Revenue this year will be down in the single digits, percentage-wise, compared to 2007. The average bill at the 347 Grill this year -- food only -- is \$28, versus \$32 in 2007.

* On cooking: "I would have trouble finding out how to turn a stove on," said Don Shula. "I can tell you how it tastes."

* On "Mean" Joe Greene, anchor of the Pittsburgh Steelers "Steel Curtain" defense and an assistant coach under Don Shula: "He was the most gentle, nicest guy you would ever want to meet," said Don Shula. "He didn't like it when you called him 'Mean' Joe."

david.ranii@newsobserver.com at 919-829-4877

[Get \\$150+ in coupons in every Sunday N&O. Click here for convenient home delivery.](#)

© Copyright 2008, The News & Observer Publishing Company

A subsidiary of [The McClatchy Company](#)