

CHARLOTTE EATS

A look at Charlotte, NC restaurants from the past to the present

Wednesday, July 30, 2008

McDonald's Cafeteria **HALL OF FAME EATERY**



John McDonald at the helm (he would introduce himself simply as 'the cook')



February 1982 photo of the original location





November 1989 photo



John & Eunice McDonald outside the cafeteria and hotel from February 1990



March 1997 interior shot with some of the regulars

For over 30 years, McDonald's Cafeteria was a West Charlotte institution. Opened by John McDonald at the start of the 1970's, McDonald's Cafeteria not only featured great home cooking, but was a gathering place for people of all races by promoting community and diversity.

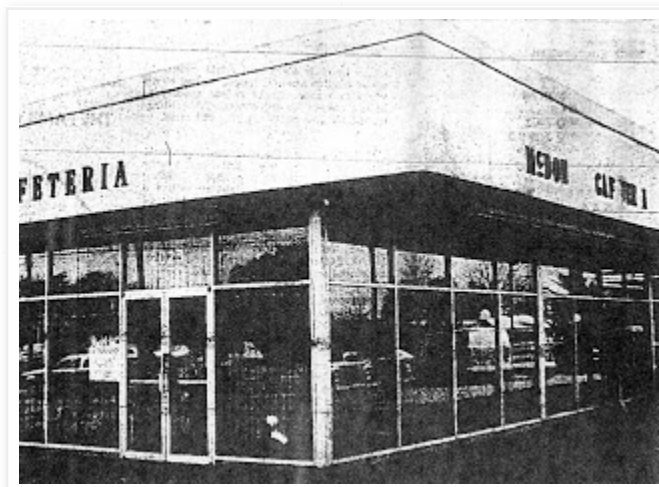
John McDonald began his restaurant career in 1949 with the opening of the popular McDonald's

Dining Room in Brooklyn, NY. He retired back to Charlotte in 1969 (he had left Charlotte originally in 1945), but by the next year had opened McDonald's Cafeteria in a small building on the corner of Beatties Ford Rd and LaSalle St. In 1982, he would move the restaurant to a larger building on Beatties Ford Rd at I-85. At the groundbreaking ceremony McDonald was quoted as saying "We're trying to give what the community is in need of...My concept is that we, as a people can do something to our own home by developing our own community. This is how we become a total person". The cafeteria would grow to include three dining rooms and several meeting rooms. McDonald would add a hotel adjacent to the cafeteria as a well as a miniature golf course next door (named Fun City).

John McDonald died of a heart attack in October of 1995. The following year, the restaurant would close due to a fire. In 1997, the cafeteria was bought and reopened under the new ownership of a group of Westside investors led by former Charlotte mayor Harvey Gantt. In June of 1999, McDonald's widow and family opened Lil' Mac's cafeteria restaurant on Central Ave (a block from the [Penguin](#)). By the summer of 2003, both McDonald's and Lil' Mac would both be closed forever.

From its fantastic food (favorites included fried chicken, turnip greens, black-eyed peas, whipped rutabagas, pecan pie, and McDonald's famous sweet tea) to its larger than life owner, McDonald's Cafeteria will always be remembered as a place that belonged to the people.

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1977 picture of LaSalle St location

[Pat R.](#) at 6:41 PM