

Get To Know Your Stock: Cracker Barrel Old Country Store

If chicken and biscuits, peas and carrots, apple pie and a friendly game of checkers on the front porch reminds you of your grandparents' house—or someone else's grandparents' house—Cracker Barrel Old Country Store, Inc. has accomplished its mission.

For 50 years, the restaurant and retail company has aimed to offer its customers “warm hospitality,” “home-style country food” and “the kind of taste we hope takes you back to breakfast in grandma’s kitchen,” it says.

Tennessee-native Dan Evins opened the first Cracker Barrel Old Country Store in September 1969 in Lebanon, Tenn. He borrowed \$40,000 to build the location, which included a gas station, a country-themed restaurant and a gift shop. Evins, who had previously served as a marine and a legislative aide, was working as an oil jobber (a middleman between oil refineries and gasoline retailers) when he developed his new concept to attract travelers passing by Lebanon on the newly opened Interstate 40.



Evins soon set his sights on serving throngs of people traversing the U.S.'s bustling new highway system. By 1977, he and his investors (mostly local friends and associates) opened 13 locations between Tennessee and Georgia. Their folksy outlets that invited customers to linger a while on rocking chairs, eat home-style cooking and shop were a sharp contrast to the fast food restaurants beginning to dot the American landscape.

Fresh vegetables and cornbread made from scratch were staples at the restaurants and the gift shops were stocked with nostalgia. The company built its Cracker Barrel locations with gas stations until the mid-1970s oil embargo. It later phased out its gas station operations altogether, but the restaurant/gift shop model stuck. Cracker Barrel Old Country Store (NASDAQ:CBRL) became publicly traded in 1981.

The company stepped up its expansion in the 1990s and opened its first Cracker Barrel venue in California last year. As of July 2019, there were 660 Cracker Barrel restaurants in 45 states. All are company owned and along or near interstate highways. Its employee count tops 10,000.

Cracker Barrel's restaurants account for more than 80% of the company's revenues and its retail operations comprise the balance. Its shops are stocked with décor, collectibles, seasonal items and holiday gifts, apparel, accessories, toys and food. In 2013, Cracker Barrel started selling food items in supermarkets. It posts some recipes on its website.

Cracker Barrel Old Country Store also operates seven locations of Holler & Dash Biscuit House, a fast, casual restaurant chain it launched in 2013 that serves up southern hospitality.

In July 2019, Cracker Barrel announced its strategic relationship with Punch Bowl Social, a growing chain that offers food, craft beverages, karaoke and games. The experiential venues are geared to attract Millennials and Generation Z—and everyone is welcome.