

pensacola news journal

Jon Smith Subs is a franchise you may start seeing a lot more of in Pensacola. Here's why.

Although [Jon Smith Subs](#) may be a new name to Pensacolians, franchise CEO Robert Cvetkovski has plans to change that — starting with the first Pensacola location that opened inside the Cordova Mall food court this week.

The restaurant has grown in popularity since opening in 1988 with signature sandwich creations such as the best-selling steak bomb, a grilled sirloin steak sandwich that is loaded onto freshly baked bread, topped with grilled onions, peppers, mushrooms, bacon, tomatoes, provolone and mayo.

Other customer favorites include the grilled kielbasa, Cuban, hot pastrami and Reuben.

Though there are existing locations of the sandwich shop spanning the country, 15 in Florida alone, Cvetkovski said hundreds more will be built out over the next three years. He anticipates the Pensacola area will be able to support four to six locations.

"Over the next one to three years we are going to be probably a 200- to 500-unit chain," Cvetkovski said.

Pensacola picked for global headquarters

Pensacola, where Cvetkovski and his family relocated to about two years ago from Miami, will be the new training center and global headquarters for Jon Smith Subs. Franchise owners will be sent to Pensacola to spend several weeks learning the ropes before opening a shop of their own.

"Everyone that buys a Jon Smith Subs in the country, or globally, would have to come to Pensacola now for training. ... Pensacola has become the global headquarters for John Smith Subs," Cvetkovski said. "Two weeks will happen where it's like classroom training, and that's also going to happen locally in Pensacola, and then two weeks of onsite training where we're teaching them how to operate the business."

There are plenty of things he has kept the same about the restaurant, like the use of its original recipes developed by founder Jon Smith himself. But he plans to continue to build the brand and help set it apart from its sub-style sandwich competitors.

Cvetkovski said one thing the company does well is taking favorite items from other fast-food chains and elevating them, like the cup of "Jon's famous fries" or cereal bombs, which are ice cream blizzards are blended with cereal.

He also plans to try out new technology at the Cordova Mall by adding scannable codes that allow customers to place their order, shop around the mall while they wait, then be texted when their sub is wrapped and ready.

He said the food quality is also something that sets the Jon Smith brand apart.

"We are a scratch kitchen. We bring in the chicken breast and the sirloin raw, we butcher it in-house, we marinate it in-house. All of our produce is locally brought in daily. All of our cheeses and meats are sliced every morning. All of our breads are baked fresh every day, sometimes two to three times a day," Cvetkovski said, "Our goal is to be the top sub in its bracket."

The Pensacola store is the first to be located in a food court in the franchise, but Cvetkovski thinks that is a good thing.

"It gives me the opportunity to expose the product and the brand. Cordova is the busiest mall you guys have here in the area," Cvetkovski said. "When we do go out into the streets, people will have seen us and really know the brand."



Owner Kristina Cvetkovski prepares to bake fresh bread at Jon Smith Subs at the Cordova Mall food court in Pensacola on Monday. *Gregg Pachkowski / Gregg@pnj.com*

He still wants to keep the true family feel of the restaurant in place, where you can spot his son grilling up a sub or his wife in the back baking the bread. Part of that local feel is fostered by partnering with community organizations, like Ascension Sacred Heart Hospital, which received about a \$1,000 donation after the restaurant's first day of business.



Stefan Cvetkovski prepares an order of fries at Jon Smith Subs at the Cordova Mall food court in Pensacola

"On opening day, I always pick either a charity or a church I dial in with in the community. We like to stay involved even after opening," he said. "We want to be embedded with the community from a local level."

Jon Smith Subs is open from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday through Saturday and 12 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Sunday.

More information can be found on the [John Smith Subs Facebook](#) page.