

The Story of Barry's Cafe: Feed the Firefighters Foundation

// BY CAROL WILLS // PHOTOS BY SEAN LARKIN PHOTOGRAPHY

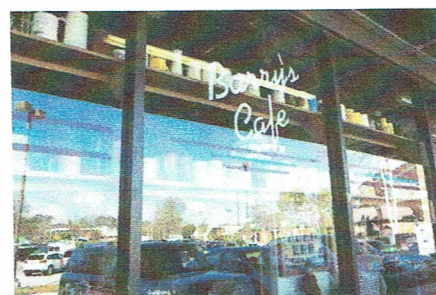
THE STORY OF BARRY'S CAFE IS ONE OF those wonderful North Carolina stories that make us proud to call this state our home. According to Denise Doyle, who, with her husband Barry, opened the café in 1992, their goal was to create a comfortable family restaurant in the Swift Creek Shopping Center of Cary.

The 50-seat café struggled to stay afloat for about a year and a half, and then something happened that would change the Doyles' lives forever. In 1994, a massive ice storm caused nearby interstates to be closed down. One of the first responders from the volunteer fire department called Barry and asked if he could supply the workers with some hot coffee. Barry was only too happy to bring them some coffee and sausage biscuits. But rather than just the handful of rescue workers that he expected to find, there were responders from three fire departments, law enforcement personnel, and almost 100 other people, including stranded motorists. But Barry was not dismayed.

Without hesitation, he kept bringing coffee and food – and did not even ask to be paid. This is where the story gets really

interesting. Within a month, the revenue from the café nearly doubled, and by the next quarter, they were on firm financial footing. In 1996, he was able to expand his restaurant from 50 to 130 seats. In addition, in order to meet the volume of calls from firefighters and emergency personnel, he set up a nonprofit organization called Feed the Firefighters Foundation that would provide food and beverages to emergency personnel. Now the foundation comprises two "stations" – Barry's Café in Cary and Assaggio's in Fuquay-Varina.

Barry's Café has won a number of awards for community service, including the Good Neighbor Award through the North Carolina Restaurant Association for taking the lead in raising over a million dollars from North Carolina restaurants to benefit the firefighter families who lost loved ones during the attack on the World Trade Center. In 2005, Dr. Jack Fritz, a member of the board of directors for FTF, designed a Rehab Unit by turning a motor home into a mobile kitchen, bathroom and rest area to be set up on the site of an emergency. And, to this day, fire and rescue personnel who identify themselves as such before ordering at the café will receive a discount on their meal.



On May 19th, Barry's Café will be celebrating its 25th year in business. "Whenever the first responders need us, they call us," says Denise. "We immediately cook food and take it to the site." During the wildfires in the western North Carolina mountains this past fall, Barry was asked to help the firefighters with all kinds of provisions to sustain them while they fought the fires. Barry called fire marshals at all the local stations around Asheville and asked for a list of the materials needed – not just food, but everything from hand sanitizer to socks, ibuprofen tablets, and lip balm. Barry says that one person came with a whole pickup load of donations for the firefighters. Barry took all the seats out of his Suburban and packed it to the ceiling with donated materials. He said he calculated the value of the items at around \$10,000.

"It's amazing how our community will come together at the slightest notice," says Denise. She and Barry have a 24-year-old daughter, Catherine, who is becoming a part of this effort to recognize and support firefighters and other emergency personnel. "Ever since Catherine was small, she's known that it's important to give back to the community," says Denise.

If you decide to visit Barry's Café, it's located at 2851 Jones Franklin Road in Raleigh's Swift Creek Shopping Center. The hours are Monday to Saturday, 6:30am to 3pm and Sunday, 8am to 2:30pm. Lunch starts at 11am and breakfast is served all day. You'll be amazed at the décor, which consists of all types of firefighting paraphernalia that customers have given to Barry and Denise for their collection. "We have memorabilia from all 50 states and 23 countries," Barry says.

Barry and Denise have as the mission statement for their cafe, "Make everyone happier than when they first came in." And so far, they've done wonders. 🍷

If you would like to donate to the Feed the Firefighters Foundation, you may either make a tax-deductible donation online at feedthefirefighters.org with credit card or PayPal, or you may send a check to the following address:

Feed the Firefighters
3900 Meadowfield Lane
Raleigh, NC 27606

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