

Grandy's Country Cookin'

by Murphy James

From the moment the president of Grandy's Country Cookin' restaurant chain hands you his business card, you know you are talking to a special guy. On that card, Walter E. (Ed) Johnson quotes Matthew 6:11: "Give us this day our daily bread." With \$30 million in his bank account as a result of the sale of Grandy's to Saga Corporation in 1983, Ed still believes in the restaurant business, his boyhood friend and partner, his wife and six kids, a non-splashy

life, and The Good Book. That formula has led to huge success.

Questions and More Questions

It all began when Johnson's parents took in an orphan boy, Rex Sanders. As 14-year-olds, Johnson



ONE-STORE START—Growing from a single restaurant in Lewisville, Texas, in 1971, Grandy's Country Cookin' restaurant chain now operates 100 outlets in 13 states. Each location can seat 140, provides take-out and catering services, and even has a drive-through window.

and Sanders worked as busboys in a Dallas restaurant. They loved the restaurant. And they asked questions, more questions—and more questions! In high school, Johnson and Sanders planned and dreamed of a restaurant of their own. Their first venture was delayed by Marine Corps hitches for both men, but by age 20 they were in business. They considered the popularity of hamburgers and pizza but decided that chicken was the food of the future. So they opened a stand called Private Sanders's Chicken A-Go-Go.

Private Sanders and Colonel Sanders

By that time, the Colonel had his chicken empire in full swing, and he stopped by one time to check out this other chicken place bearing the name Sanders. During his visit, Colonel Sanders admitted that he was not a "real" colonel. Rex Sanders, in turn, really had been a Marine private and, as such, had a perfect right

to the name. The Colonel laughed, wished them luck, and left.

Johnson and Sanders were not afraid of hard work. They had no problem starting work at 4 a.m. and staying with it for 16 hours a day. The business prospered. What was the "secret" of the success of these entrepreneurs? "No secret," says Johnson. "Just a single-minded focus and sacrifice." Both men rejected big houses and fancy cars when the first profits came. Johnson conscientiously

saved half his salary in order to reserve capital for future ventures. Sanders lived in a one-room garage apartment for 10 years, didn't own a car, and watched television on an old, used set. But they hung in there. They added a second Private Sanders.

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Walter E. "Ed" Johnson



Rex E. Sanders