

Milo's serves up a warehouse in Bessemer

Tea, sauce distributor leaving Oxmoor

BY GILBERT NICHOLSON / STAFF

The secret recipe for Milo's famous hamburger sauce and ice tea will be concocted and bottled this spring in a new warehouse off Morgan Road in Bessemer.

Milo's Restaurant Services will vacate its current 21,000-square-foot facility behind Barber's Dairies just off West Oxmoor Road in Homewood. The new 28,000-square-foot warehouse, designed and built by Acton Construction, is in the Morgan Industrial Park, two miles from the Morgan Road exit on Interstate 459.

Owner Ronnie Carlton, whose parents, Milo and Bea Carlton started Milo's hamburgers in North Birmingham in 1946, says he just ran out of room.

"We've been here 12 years, and it's been like adding a room here and there to your home; it's a hodgepodge," says the 50-year-old Carlton. "We need to do some modernizing and improve the flow of the product from where it's made to the refrigerator and out to the refrigerated trucks."

More room is also needed to accommodate refrigerated deliv-

ery trucks. Milo's delivers tea to almost 400 grocery stores, and sauce to 14 franchised hamburger restaurants. The company expanded its iced tea sales to Huntsville last month, and already serves Montgomery.

"Our sales are growing so rapidly, we can't keep up," Carlton says. "It would possibly work here if we had more real estate around it, but we butt right up against the (Red) mountain. Getting the trucks in and out of here is a zoo. We needed an industrial park because of the utilities and the large number of trucks coming in and out."

The new building is about 60 percent finished, with plans for an overnight move in March, a logistical challenge in itself.

"We're going to shut down here the last day and start back up over there the very next day," Carlton says. "It will be a tough move."

5,000-gallon vats

Built on a 5-acre plot, the new facility will have 5,000-gallon tea brewing tanks, boilers, chillers, and an array of tea and sauce-



PHOTO BY OWEN STAYNER

Ronnie Carlton, son of hamburger restaurant founders Milo and Bea Carlton, will soon be making Milo's famous tea and hamburger sauce at a new warehouse off Morgan Road in Bessemer.

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making equipment, along with large refrigerated areas. Carlton declines to disclose the value of the warehouse.

Four new 40-foot refrigerated trucks will join the current fleet of nine 22-footers.

Carlton said he chose Bessemer and its Morgan Industrial Park because of land costs and its central location, which is planned for the eventual extension of Lakeshore Parkway to Highway 150.

Learning the ropes

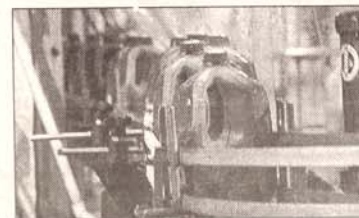
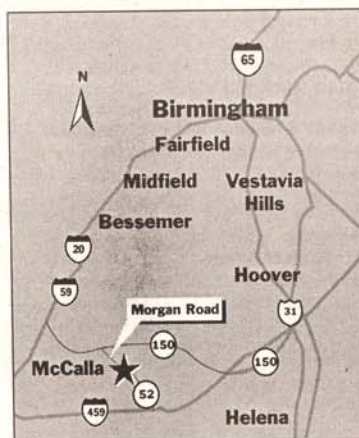
Carlton's father, Milo, learned the fast-food ropes at his brother's northside restaurant, The Dipsey Doodle, in 1939. Milo continued to cook hamburgers while assigned to the Army's Food Service Division during World War II. He even opened a hamburger shop in Australia, according to the company Web site.

He opened Milo's at 31st Street and 12th Avenue North in 1946. The restaurant's first franchise was sold in 1983. Franchise owner Dean Chitwood operates 14 of the restaurants.

Ronnie Carlton's Milo's Restaurant Services owns no restaurants or franchises. The company makes and distributes tea and sauce.

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MILO'S WAREHOUSE LOCATION



MILO'S RESTAURANT SERVICES

What: Makes and distributes Milo's tea and hamburger sauce
Where: 108 Aquarius Drive, Homewood, 35209
Phone: (205) 945-0617
Moving to: Morgan Industrial Park, 3112 Dublin Lane, Bessemer
On the Web: www.milosinc.com