

tastytv

BY GEORGE DICKIE

Philanthropist comes to the aid of pandemic-stricken eateries on 'Restaurant Recovery'

Todd Graves is a big believer in the American dream.

As founder and CEO of Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers, he's built a \$2 billion business with more than 530 restaurants and 35,000 employees across the United States and more than reaped the rewards of entrepreneurship. So when the pandemic struck and he watched family-owned and -operated restaurants struggle and fail, he knew he had to help. And thus "Restaurant Recovery" was born.

Currently streaming on discovery+, the 10-episode series follows Graves and his Raising Cane team as they work directly with owners struggling to hang on, offering creative ideas and common sense renovations designed to maximize resources, bring revenues back up to their previous levels and keep these eateries in business.

"They couldn't prepare for this ...," Graves says of the restaurateurs, "You make small margins on large volumes in restaurants. You just don't make a ton of money off of them and you couldn't save enough money. It's just one of these things and all of a sudden your sales drop and you still have to pay your rent and you still have to pay your utilities and you still have to pay your crew. You have all those expenses going out and the dollars don't come in. I mean, these people's businesses went down – I was

shocked at some who were 50 percent and then some of them were 75 percent and it broke my heart what was going on with the industry."

Graves and his crew went to eateries in locales such as Los Angeles, Denver, Chicago and Baton Rouge, La., and offered up ideas such as converting their service to outdoor dining, takeout and delivery and even bottling and selling homemade creations like barbecue sauce. He also made suggestions on COVID-19 safety, gave direct financial relief to owners drowning in debt and even enlisted celebrity friends such as rappers Snoop Dogg and Nelly, actor Rob Schneider, NFL star Archie Manning and NBA great Shaquille O'Neal to give their support.

"I'd known Shaq from back in Baton Rouge days," Graves says of O'Neal, who attended college in that city at Louisiana State University, "so I called him and told him what we were doing and he said, 'Man, I'm happy to help.' And with him, you can imagine the spirits lifted when he walked in the room. And Snoop and I are friends. He came out and he was like, 'These are family-owned restaurants. This is what we should be helping.' ...

"But this was the easiest ask I'd ever had for anybody, celebrity contact or friend that I know," he continues. "They all jumped on it. I didn't have one person that didn't want to help."



Todd Graves

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