

GEORGE CASTON



2026 HALL OF FAME LEGACY INDUCTEE

GEORGE “TOOTS” CASTON

For more than half a century, George “Toots” Caston was the driving force behind Fresh Air Bar-B-Que, one of the oldest barbecue places in Georgia and a beloved exemplar of that state’s Piedmont barbecue style.

Fresh Air opened in 1929 as a roadside stand with sawdust-covered floors and picnic tables near Jackson, on the highway between Atlanta and Macon. Joel Watkins, a veterinarian, founded the restaurant and ran it until his death in 1945. Caston started working there about that time and soon bought the business. He rebuilt the pit so he could cook more pork (hams, not shoulders), added an inside dining room, and started making Brunswick stew from an old family recipe (using beef, a novelty for Georgia stew).

Over the decades, Caston and his wife, Doris, built Fresh Air into a Georgia institution. It was named the state’s best barbecue place in numerous media polls. It also built a regional and national following serving generations of motorists headed to Florida and back. Caston worked long hours, often sleeping on a cot near the fire, hauling the oak and hickory wood himself, and stirring the stew pots with both hands. He worked at Fresh Air until the day before he died, at 89, in 1996.

The restaurant is still run by his family, his grandchildren and great-grandchildren now. “I hope this place lasts 100 years,” Caston said in an interview not long before he died. He’s getting his wish.