

# John Rivers ('87)



Following a 20-year career in health care, John Rivers retired as president of a \$1.5 billion company to pursue a lifelong dream of opening a restaurant. In 2009, he created his first concept, 4 Rivers Smokehouse, which quickly became one of the fastest-growing restaurants in the Southeast. Since then, the 4 Rivers business has grown to 22 locations in Florida, including Rivers' other concepts, the Southern-inspired The COOP, the Cantina Barbacoa Food Truck at Disney Springs, and the farm-to-table 4Roots Café. 4 Rivers garnered national recognition, including the title of "The South's Best BBQ" by Southern Living magazine and the "#1 BBQ Chain" by MSN.

Born out of Rivers' garage, the "barbeque ministry" remains at the heart of the company's mission to lift up those in need and help build better communities. The culmination of the 4R Foundation's work, the Orlando-based 4Roots Farm, will serve as a community campus to inspire revolutionary change in Florida's food system through education on sustainable and regenerative farming, advancements in agriculture technology, and research in culinary medicine via the launch of the Culinary Health Institute.

Author of The Southern Cowboy Cookbook, Rivers has been named one of the Restaurant Business magazine's "The Power 20" elite leaders, Restaurateur of the Year by Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association, and Orlando Magazine's "50 Most Powerful: 15 to Watch."

He has cooked at the prestigious James Beard House in New York City, and was twice named a finalist for the EY Entrepreneur of the Year Award. He serves on the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Food Security Advisory Council and the Department of Agriculture Innovation Committee and is a member of the Florida Council of 100.