

Seven customers crowd the register to either pay for or order their Caribbean food.

But no one is in a rush, and Lisa Rose, behind the cash register, takes her time, making the food and dishing it out as she hums along to the reggae music playing overhead.

Such is Rose's life now at The Jerk Pit, a Jamaican restaurant she has run for six years. The first five years the storefront was in the Campus Village Shopping Center until she moved to its current location at 9078 Baltimore Avenue, a little over a mile north of the University of Maryland.

Customers went to the old location, Lisa said, for the food; jerk chicken, jerk tofu, jerk fishes. "Jerk" is a hot Jamaican spice added to dry-rubbed or wet-marinated meat.

But customers come to the new location, which boasts both a more spacious interior and exterior, for the entertainment and lifestyle, she said.

"First we had a restaurant. Now we have what I want to do – the entertainment part of it. ... This is just a more laid back place so we could evolve into what I wanted to do – entertain people with music."

Reggae tunes can be heard playing at The Jerk Pit all day, while the restaurant also hosts karaoke on Wednesday nights and a DJ Friday and Sunday nights.

"Saturdays we used to have a live band – we had to cut that out. We had a neighbor that kept complaining about the noise from the band. We're in the process of figuring that out," Rose explained.

The "restaurant/chill spot," as Rose described it, was her ideal from the start. Born and raised in Jamaica, Rose witnessed this blend of food and music and wanted to recreate it in Maryland.

And while the style has changed, Rose maintains that the food is still the same unique jerk-style meat.

“Pretty much everything on the menu is popular. Jerk chicken is probably the most popular, but the customers just love anything jerk,” she said.

One aspect that has changed, Rose said, is the clientele. The University of Maryland-dominated atmosphere has disappeared since the move, Rose said.

The travel, which amounts to a little over a mile, has proven too much for many Maryland students.

“It’s just too far from campus, I’m not walking that far,” junior Jonathan Elbaz said.

Zach Schmid, also a junior, said that while he has a car, he is not familiar with The Jerk Pit.

“I haven’t heard enough about it to get me to go,” he said.

The different crowd has enhanced the chill, laid back atmosphere that Rose has tried to create, though, she said. And she said that still, some students have followed the jerk chicken farther up Baltimore Avenue.

“We get some [students], but we are a bit far away. I’d say 60 percent of the customers though are Caribbean.”

Her competition, too, has changed with the move. While she used to compete with a variety of close restaurants on Baltimore Avenue for students’ dollars, she said, the new location has resulted in more specific competing businesses.

“There are none too close,” she said. “But there are a couple of Caribbean places in Laurel. Customers probably have to choose between us and them.”

These restaurants include Island Flavors and Negril Jamaican Eatery, she said.

Although the clientele and competition have radically changed since the move, Rose is ecstatic with the restaurant – both in atmosphere and financially.

“We’ve been around for six years and we’re only going to grow,” she said.