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The interior of the Red Rooster sports bar on September 19, 2025 in Madison, Wis. Photo by [Finnegan Ricco](#) | The Daily Cardinal

## [CITY NEWS](#)

### 'This isn't just a bar, this a movement': First women-centered sports bar in Madison to open

*The bar's owner Rita Adair says the venue aims to honor her late wife, a huge fan of women's sports, and provide a unique space for community members to enjoy women's sports*

By [Haellie Opp](#)

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Bernell's, a new sports bar scheduled to open Oct. 24 on Madison's East Side, will make history as the city's first women-centered sports bar.

Owner Rita Adair was inspired to open the bar to honor her late wife Bernell Hooker's legacy. Hooker — once owner of the Milwaukee Aces, a professional women's basketball club — was beloved in the sports community.

After Adair struggled to find women's sports programming at other sports bars in Madison, the push to open Bernell's became serious. Knowing how "fired up" Hooker was watching the growth of the women's sports industry, Adair realized a space dedicated to women was what her wife would've wanted.

"I did a test here where I went to 15 bars over a six month period and asked to watch certain games. Only one bar said yes," Adair said. "And that really was like, 'Okay, Rita. This is needed. You need to be in a place where it isn't even a question that women's sports can be on the screens.'"

After setbacks from a financial investor backing out, Adair turned to community fundraising. With inspiration from other women's sports bars around the country, Adair [recognized the movement that is women's sports bars](#).

"This is something happening in our country with women's sports, and every sport, not just basketball," Adair said. "Women are really becoming more present, more visible. Teams are just growing in every way including skills, finance and visibility."

Adair believes that the Madison community is ready for a new environment like Bernell's, yet the bar will still pay homage to Red Rooster, the bar that previously occupied the building, with Blues music every Thursday night.

Alongside the sports and Blues music, Karaoke will also be a focal point of Bernell's. Hoping to showcase larger bands and local talent, Adair wants to give the community a place to enjoy all kinds of entertainment.

"I plan on doing a big thing outdoors, like a music festival, in the summer," Adair said. Their menu will include soul food and a Taco Tuesday.

"We are very open as a community in a lot of ways, and I think the commonality will show. People will come in here and enjoy it and have a good time," Adair said.

Adair also wants the bar to be accessible to University of Wisconsin-Madison students by use of a trolley or event nights to get students involved.

Adair acknowledged the "nay-ser's" that have doubted Adair and the opening of Bernell's. After Adair had to resort to fundraising to open the bar, she noted people didn't believe it could happen.

"In terms of licensing and the community, getting the licensing and getting permissions, that has not been a problem at all," Adair said. "Matter of fact, it's been overwhelmingly accepted."

Adair must go through in front of the Common Council for final proof and pass final inspections, but the opening of Bernell's is set for Oct. 24. With an easily spotted rooster on the side of the building, patrons can access the bar on opening day at 2513 Seiferth Road.

"I am like a part of a movement of women that are really trying to make sure that the world sees them and that they're treated with equity and the value for what they do in the game of sports," Adair said.

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