

## **As printed in the National BBQ News: October 2009**

### **Contest cooking**

#### **Good friends, good times, times five.**

I have lamented in the past about BBQ contest's and the folks that compete in them. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, (I wonder if anyone under the age of 25 even knows what a broken record is), I feel I must reiterate.

First, let me say, cooking in a BBQ contest is a heck of a lot of work. I am not even considering the pre and post work that is involved. From the time we arrive at the site on Friday late morning/afternoon, we barely have a chance to sit down, let alone relax. You say up late Friday night then sleep under a canopy on a fold up cot for a few hours. Get up before the sun on Saturday morning, work all morning, get your boxes to the judges then receive your score. You then pack up what you just set up 20 hours before, then drive several hours back to your home. Sounds like a blast don't it?

Did I mention no showers and spending countless hours on your feet? Oh, and how about dealing with the weather, heat, humidity, wind, rain, uneven sites, mosquitoes, slippery grass, overflowing spot-a-pots, unwanted guests, loud neighbors, and water that taste like garden hose. Then there is always the obnoxious drunk that stops by your sight while you are doing some prep work on Friday night and wants to tell you how great of a cook he is, all the while he can barely even stand up straight. And no, I am not talking about my team mates!

There is meat to be trimmed, sauces to make, boxes to build, dishes to wash and grates to be scrubbed. Unpacking, setting up, repacking, and this is if every thing is running smoothly. Please, form a neat orderly line, no pushing or shoving in order to sign up.

Keep in mind, we are PAYING to have all of this fun. That's right, laying out hard earned greenbacks and burning a vacation time from work just to be able to play. And the cost, please, don't tell my wife. You have the entry fee, the beer, the cost of the meats you are cooking, the beer, gasoline, tolls, camp food, camp beer, charcoal, beer, sauces and seasonings, garnish, tequila, well, you get the picture. I haven't even mentioned the equipment cost, cookers, beer, trucks, trailers, beer, I have to stop or I'll want to quit.

This gets me to my point. I would never even consider cooking a contest by myself. I have seen it done and done quite well. My hat is tipped to those that have pulled it off, but it is just not for me. The first and most obvious reason is for the sheer amount of work involved. As a somewhat portly, out of shape, on the back side of middle aged, wanna-be BBQ cook, flying solo at a contest would do me in. I have four super team mates that work as hard or harder than I when we are at a contest and when I get home on Saturday evening, I'm whooped.

The other more significant reason I wouldn't do a contest solo is I would miss the fun we have as a team. I look forward to each contest as a great chance to spend time with my

friends and my wife. As well as the chance to see my BBQ friends, old and new, I have met along the way.

Even though we are in the middle of a park somewhere in a town we don't know, our gang always manages to have a good time. We will have a nice meal on Friday night, and then we wander around to visit with the other teams. Occasionally sipping a few drinks. Sometimes, we will prepare breakfast Saturday morning, either way; we have a lot of fun with an awful lot of laughs.

Speaking of friends, in my short time hanging out with this BBQ crowd I have been very fortunate to meet some really nice folks. Some I have met on-line in some of the various BBQ forums that I visit from time to time. Others I have met in person at the different contests we have cooked. Usually, after a conversation or two, it's as though we have known each other for years.

This past spring in Green Lane PA I was fortunate to have my old friends, my wife and a new friend hanging out with me. Bobby, Erich, Al, and Jo are my team and whose help I could not do without. Steve, better known as Sledneck, is a fellow Qer I met through the BBQ Brethren Forum. I invited Steve to hang out with us at Green Lane as he had been hopped recently with a bad ankle injury.

Steve limped into our site mid-day on Friday and after some brief introductions and small talk was just one of the gang. Believe me when I tell you, his temporary handicap didn't buy him any slack from the usual sharp barbs hurled around by the WATG? crew, it was like he had been cooking with us from the start, and in a way, he has. Everyone one that I have met along this BBQ road that I travel is a part of my team, whether they like it or not! My buddy Steve aka Sledneck was no exception, he fit right in with the others. By midday Saturday as I walked briefly around the contest grounds I could hear the laughs coming from our site, good times, good friends, this is what it is all about.

For me, the time spent with my friends, old and new, is why I like to que. Sure, we could just stay home, surf the net, save some money, watch a movie, light the gas grill, toss on a few steaks, clean up with running water, take a shower and sleep in a nice comfortable bed. But it just wouldn't be the same; we would be missing the contest ambiance and the camaraderie, both huge in my book. Not to mention the laughs.

Sweet blue smoke, good weather, great friends, tasty food, gracious hosts, and cold beer, it don't git no better than this. I can't think of a nicer way of spending the night in the middle of a municipal park in Green Lane Pennsylvania. You know the State motto of PA is "you've got a friend in Pennsylvania", well, this past June, I was lucky enough to have five.