



# BBQ Competition

On April 23, the Hogs and Heat Barbecue competition was hosted at St. Pius School. The air was charged with the sweet smoke of barbecue that wafted down Woodside Road, and wove through the neighboring streets. By smell alone, it was an event fit for the Food Network. The lively competition and abundance of flavor did not disappoint, either.

The barbecue rib and chili competition was a first for Redwood City. Twenty-six teams – twenty professional, and six “backyard” or amateur – descended upon St. Pius School, tools in hand, barbecues in tow. Preparations began at five o’clock in the morning, and in those early hours the energy was low and slow – just how the ribs would be cooked. But as the coals warmed and the sun rose, so did the competitors, and by eight o’clock the party was in full throttle. Rock n’ roll classics played from loudspeakers and the competitors bounced from tent to tent, checking in on friends from competitions past, exchange-



ing friendly banter. Barbecue is as much about the community as it is the food.

“Well, I got into barbecue because I like to eat barbecue,” said Jack Ceccotti, the leader of *Smokeholics*, one of the backyard teams. “But I also love the process – you’re outdoors and with friends – it’s relaxing.” Hogs and Heat is Ceccotti’s first competition, and he is keeping a careful eye on the temperature inside the black box that looks more like an indestructible safe than barbecue. Snowflakes of paper ash fly through the air as he encourages the flames with a handheld fan. Every detail, from using paper over lighter fluid, to the types of wood used – Ceccotti prefers maple and pecan – has been carefully selected.

Asked about the differences between home barbecuing and competition, Ceccotti explained, “At home, even if your timing is a bit off, the end result will still taste good. At home, meat falling off the bone is good. In competition, that’s bad. There is very little room for error. It’s about appearance, taste and texture. You get one bite per judge.”

Ready to review the next steps, Ceccotti’s wife, Lori, appeared at his side. In hushed tones, not unlike a quarterback and coach, they discussed their plan. Strategy is key, and the two have crafted and tested their attack for months. Satisfied with the game plan, Ceccotti hollered over to his neighbor, “Well, Bob, you might as well go home, we’ve got this one in the bag!”

“Why,” Bob retorted, “You pay off the judges?”

Down the aisle from the *Smokeholics* is *Swine and Wine*, one of the professional teams. The team of four is in its second year of competition, and have already

begun collecting accolades. Still, the motivation is not just in winning. “These competitions, they’re kind of the ultimate hall pass,” says team captain Mark Rowen with a laugh. “You get to be outside with your friends, in the community, having fun.”

For Hogs and Heat, the team has entered both the rib and chili competitions. “We do a Kansas City style for the ribs, and our chili, it has a little back heat on it,” explained Rowen. “We’ve won before with this one [chili], and we’re hoping to again.” Beyond the full flavor and “back heat” of the chili, it couldn’t go unnoticed that the meat was cut into perfect, tiny cubes. “The chopping – that’s Tim’s job. He drew the

short straw,” laughed Rowen. Teammate Tim Bower grinned and shrugged – he did not seem to mind.

Fun, food and competition are at the root of barbecue competition, but for Hogs and Heat, there is another element: raising money for the St. Pius youth group. “You know, our whole reason for this is to raise money, and I thought this kind of competition would be fun,” said Joey Wayne, the event’s organizer. A chef turned professional competitor himself, Wayne’s team, *Right on Cue* was also in the Hogs and Heat mix, hoping to win the \$500 first place

prize for best ribs. The People’s Choice – the votes from the attendees who pay admission to taste the ribs and chili – is also a coveted award. Where money fails, bragging rights soothe.

After hours of smoking, testing, and checking, the verdict from the panel of judges is in. The winner in the rib category is *Rob’s Smokin’ Rub* and in chili it’s team *Big Shot*. Admittedly, it’s a disappointing loss for the *Smokaholics*, *Swine and Wine* and *Right on Cue*. In the end though, it wasn’t really about winning. Not totally, at least. No judge can take away a day with friends in the sun, and after all is said and done, they’ll always have barbecue. **C**



Event organizer, Joey Wayne.



Most depended on old fashioned low-tech cookers, while others (left) used high-tech methods to control heat.



Top: Amateur competitors were stacked up against many pros, some of whom brought their own rolling kitchens.

Right: The tasting crew rolls in with a cart of samples.



Left: Winner of the rib cookoff, team Rob’s Smokin’ Rub.



Top: Competitors get fired up early morning in the parking lot of St. Pius School. Right: Details matter. Jack Ceccotti levels his barbeque — at 5am.

