

Camaraderie why he's a BBQ competitor

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Backdraft BBQ loves his barbecue family.

Ryan Grob doesn't hesitate to explain why he packs up nearly every weekend in the summer and fall to compete in up to 30 professional barbecue competitions yearly.

"The camaraderie," said Grob, whose Backdraft BBQ also designs and sells smokers, sauces and rubs. "It's like a second family."

And family members usually help each other out.

Earlier, fellow competitors and friends on the team Smoke-N-THE Rockies at the Pony Express BBQ Challenge in Gothenburg handed Grob a part for his smoker when his temperature probe didn't work.

Grob also competes because of the thrill.

"Always trying to improve and do better," he said.

A professional pit master "on and off" for 21 years, Grob is now settled in Henderson, CO.

He got into the profession while bartending in his hometown of Murphysboro, IL, at the 17th Street Bar and Grill.

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Mike Mills, who Grob described as a barbecue legend, owned the business.

"I became interested in barbecuing and started making sauces and rubs and decided to jump into competition," he said.

Grob was 19 years old.

These days, barbecue—which is smoking food as opposed to grilling—exploded with television shows, books, articles and more devoted to the art.

When Grob first became involved, he said competitions were more secretive.

Today, he said professional pit masters have to be more open because they sell their own products and potential customers want to know the ingredients.

"But there's still some that hold back," Grob said.

Grob himself is more open than in the past and shared basic ingredients to make a tasty basic barbecue sauce—tomato base, brown sugar, garlic, salt and pepper.

Competitions usually include creating tasty chicken, ribs, pork, brisket and often even items like seafood, Grob's favorite food.

Sometimes barbecuers also create desserts as entries, he said.

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Competing professionally can become tiring.

During a season of competitions, Grob often leaves home on Thursday to travel to the next contest over a long weekend and is packing up again midweek.

Money is earned through prize dollars and selling smokers and other barbecue products.

“A lot of teams are happy to break even,” Grob said about the actual competitions. “And you can do well one week and not the next. It’s entirely up to the judges.”

Backdraft BBQ has won grand and reserve championships and first places as well as the people’s choice award four times in Parker, CO, contests. Grob retired from vending after the final win to concentrate more on competitions.

Often, if the competition is nearby his home, his son and wife will travel with him if the kids don’t have activities and his wife isn’t working as an insurance adjuster or going to school full-time.

If not, it’s usually just Grob and his Akita dog “Kuma.”

Grob also has his barbecue family who are members of the Rocky Mountain BBQ Association and often travel to the same competitions.

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