



For Immediate Release  
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### **BBQ Capital Cook-off Teams Exceed Expectations in Many Ways**

(Lexington, NC) Thirty-four teams from across the nation have registered to compete in the Lexington's Inaugural BBQ Capital Cook-off.

In the early planning stages for the Cook-off, organizers at Uptown Lexington, Inc. (ULI), set a success benchmark of 18 participating cooking teams, according to event Chairman Chad Hodges. "Teams are coming from across the United States," said Hodges. "They are driving from Illinois, Texas, Virginia, South Carolina, New York, and all across North Carolina. The word is out - this is the place to be. "With several weeks left," Hodges continued, "we anticipate as it gets closer to the event, this number will only increase."

The teams themselves have amazing stories, according to Jo Ellen Edwards, executive director of ULI. "If team names are indicative of their cooking presentations, those attending the event will have much to see," Edwards explained. Some of them include: Kool Koals, Camel City Smokers, My Sweet Hog Cooking Team, Damn Yankees, Uncle Mac's BBQ Crue, Smoke N' Ice, Callaway Cremators, Pickin' Porkers, Smokin TNT, and Pork Barrel BBQ (from DC of course).

"One story in particular tugs at our heart strings. Its name is CancerSucksChicago.com" said Edwards. This team is dedicated to not only cooking the best barbecue they can but also raising money for the Corliss Johnson Foundation. Corliss was the wife, mother and sister-in-law of team members Scottie, Lexi, Zoe and Lizanne Johnson who died from cancer in 2003. In fact, the team name comes from a "Cancer Sucks" button Corliss wore every Thursday when she went for her cancer treatments.

"I tell my girls we do this for their Mommy," said Johnson. Only cooking competitively since 2002, he has won enough championships across the US to donate \$200,000 to the foundation that provided research for cancer. "Lexington, NC will be our 30th state we have cooked in so far; we try to add 4-5 new states each year."

In fact, he is such a great cooker that in 2006 he won the prestigious Jack Daniels Championship during his 10th competition. Johnson said that, although he was thrilled to win, the competition was bittersweet: right before the event, he received a word that his dad had just died from cancer as well. Knowing his dad was quite ill, he hesitated competing. But his dad had insisted that Johnson follow his dream and compete. "I'm honored to be called a world champion. But I'm more honored to be able to have a way to raise awareness and money for this important cause," Johnson said.

The Johnsons give 100% of what they win and also from the proceeds from an annual cooking class that cleared \$25,000 recently. Johnson works as an attorney, but sees the BBQ cookers as a big family. "I've cooked all over the United States and have friends everywhere. You'll find we're a very giving group too." Johnson added that many competitors donate a portion of their winnings to the foundation.

Cook-off attendees will be able to find Scottie and his girls by the large logos on their RV and the t-shirts. "My girls love for people to come to the competitions and are thrilled when people want to buy a team shirt."

To read more about Scottie Johnson and his team look them up on Facebook or visit [www.bbqsmokersite.com/interview-with-cancersuckschicago-com-founder-scottie-johnson/](http://www.bbqsmokersite.com/interview-with-cancersuckschicago-com-founder-scottie-johnson/)

Another team with a story is Pork Barrel BBQ. A Missouri native, Heath Hall grew up watching his Dad cook out in their yard all year round. "I call him the 'Post Office of BBQ' because he cooks year round no matter the weather". When it came time to choose a career, it was between culinary school and law school. Even though law school won, he never lost his love of cooking.

His law career has taken him to a career on Capitol Hill and currently works for the Heritage Foundation. In 2006 during a break from a Senate debate on pork barrel spending, Hall and his soon to be partner, Brett Thompson started talking about restaurants and in particular the lack of a good barbecue restaurant in D. C. "We were eating some really bad pizza and thought Pork Barrel BBQ would be a catchy name for a restaurant. "They thought beginning with a rub would be a good starting point. So they formed their "Kitchen Cabinet" (aka friends and relatives) to sample their spice rubs.

At this point, their BBQ career took two paths – cooking competitively and marketing their rubs, according to Hall.

After realizing how difficult it was to get their products into stores, they decided to run their campaign just as they would a political campaign. They looked for earned media opportunities and started using Twitter. Soon, they were the largest BBQ entity on Twitter. This caught the attention of the producers of the ABC series *Shark Tank*, who invited them to submit a video application for the show.

Believing "Reward lives in the house of risk", they jumped at the chance, Hall recalled. Not only were they accepted onto the show, but Shark Barbara Corcoran is now their business partner. Doors have opened and their products are now in over 1300 stores nationwide, Hall said.

The two have also been competitive cookers since 2009. Entering their first contest just weeks before their trip to Hollywood for *Shark Tank*, they placed second in the sauce category in the Nation's Best BBQ Sauce contest, Hall said. Their latest venture is currently unfolding. They will open Pork Barrel BBQ – the restaurant, in Alexandria, Virginia in late April or early May.

Hall says. "Competitive BBQ cooking is the more fun part of what we do. Plus, we get to see friends we've made across the country. Our cookers are ready to come out of hibernation! We're ready to come to Lexington and compete!"

You can read more about them on their BBQ blog, [www.bbqbackyard.com](http://www.bbqbackyard.com) or their website [www.porkbarrelbbq.com](http://www.porkbarrelbbq.com) .

Mack Yarbrough, or “Rusty” as his 1961 Lexington Senior High class members remember him, is now the proprietor of a café and tea room just outside of Dallas, TX with his wife and family. “This is my retirement job, my real life,” said Yarbrough. “Competing is my hobby.” An Ohio State BBQ Champion, this competitor is returning home to compete. “I am looking forward to seeing friends and family in Lexington. Come see me!” said Yarbrough.

“When the contest was just in the planning stages, Rusty called us and said he would be here and he wanted to be the first registered competitor”, said Edwards. “And, he was! He served as a great resource in those early planning stages and also helped us to facilitate the sanctioning by the Kansas City Barbecue Society.”

“It’s fun to compete! When you arrive you know half the people there, by the end of the evening you know the other half, and you swap stories all night!” said Yarbrough. “At least somebody on the team is up with the cooker while other team members sleep.”

Yarbrough and his wife Sharon were first introduced to cooking while living in Seattle, Washington when they joined a chili cooking group. While at a chili cook-off in the late 1990’s, they discovered the world of competitive barbecue cooking. Since then he has won numerous contests and out of about 4,000 teams, he is now in the top 150 KCBS teams in the United States.

“While I was in Charlotte in 2003 on business, I entered the Kings Mountain KCBS sanctioned contest with borrowed equipment and spices I bought from the Dollar Store. I didn’t do anything special, and I won the contest!” said Yarbrough. Yarbrough’s team consists of Mack and his wife Sharon. “We compliment each other! I cook, she tastes and boxes!” said Yarbrough.

Yarbrough said most competitors will spend at \$1000 on each contest they participate in – not including the cost of their equipment. Typically each team will cook two briskets, 18-24 chicken thighs, three full racks of ribs, and two 8-10 pound pork butts. They will select the pieces with the best appearance and taste to turn in for judging. Carefully prepared displays include 6-8 slices of brisket, 6 thighs, 6 pulled pork samples and 6-8 ribs.

Like most cooks, Yarbrough is quick to remind those planning to come to the event, because of Health Department Regulations, you can not purchase or taste the meat prepared by the competitors.

“However, we will have barbecue vendors on site who are also caterers who will be preparing meats in the same manner as the competitors,” said Hodges.

“ULI is looking forward to welcoming all the competing teams and as well over 60 KCBS judges to uptown Lexington,” said Holshouser.

If you are interested in competing as a cooker or being a volunteer on ULI’s Hospitality Team, call ULI at 336-249-0383. Additional information about the BBQ Capital Cook-off is available at [www.uptownlexington.com](http://www.uptownlexington.com).