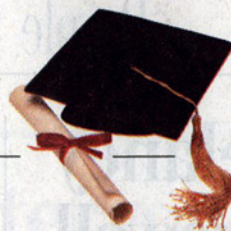


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## Real 'cue deserves support

Far too much second-rate pig meat is being peddled as authentic North Carolina barbecue these days.

I have been faithful to the Holy Grub. Yet I feel like a lovesick cowboy who has been done wrong by a cheatin' gal.

I have recently been sorely disappointed in the saucy offerings of new joints that did not deliver the Down East barbecue they claimed. Last week I ate in



Dennis  
Rogers

a famous Lexington dive where the bleached blonde waitress may have called me "shug" but the pig was pitiful. We need standards. Now, more than ever, we need a North Carolina Barbecue Society. Now, more than ever, we need Jim Early, who is trying to gin up support for an organization devoted to the proper respect for the divine swine.

OK, so he's a lawyer in Winston-Salem. Get over it. He's also a serious barbecue man who wrote a paean to pigs called "The Best Tarheel Barbecue," a guide to 140 barbecue joints from Manteo to Murphy. The man knows his 'cue.

"We need to preserve our barbecue culture," he said. "A lot of it is fading away."

As Early envisions it, the North Carolina Barbecue Society would both celebrate and preserve our famous barbecue culture. There would be classes in real pit cooking, almost a lost art in these too-easy days of gas and electric smokers.

There would be a historic Barbecue Trail with directions to the authentic smoky pits where barbecue is cooked the right way: low, slow and with real wood.

"We might even try for tax breaks for those pit masters who do it the right way, sort of the way you can get a tax break for restoring a historic house," Early said.

The sad truth is, it's hard to find traditional barbecue pits without a map these days. Once you could follow your nose. Now, as Early said, "By the time you buy wood, pay a pit master, pay the higher insurance rates caused by chimney fires, operating a real pit is like pushing a Cadillac uphill with a rope. I'm not saying its not doable, but it's getting tough."

The society would sponsor a celebration of the tasty trifecta of smoke, swine and time called the Tarheel Barbecue Classic. Barbecue experts from the east, Piedmont and mountains would gather in Raleigh for a weekend of eating, cooking, seminars and storytelling devoted to the food that once made Parkers Barbecue on U.S. 301 in Wilson among the state's most famous tourist attractions.

And — please remove your hat as a sign of respect — there would be an official Barbecue Hall of Fame. The first inductees would likely be the Rev. Adam Scott of Goldsboro, a black Holiness preacher who sold barbecue off his back porch in the 1930s; Bob Melton, whose restaurant on the Tar River was legendary in Rocky Mount; Warner Stamey, the godfather of Lexington-style pig; and Eastern North Carolina's own King of 'Cue, the recently-deceased Pete Jones of Ayden's Skylight Inn. They are this state's Sultans of Smoke.

Early's plans are grand, but pats on the back don't spend at the bank. The society will only succeed if people who respect our culture of 'cue get behind it.

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