



# Food



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMES EARLY

**FIRST IN 'CUE:** Jim Early has ambitious plans for the North Carolina Barbecue Society.

## Pig Praise

*N.C. finally getting its own barbecue society*

**W**hen planning a barbecue festival four years ago, Jim Early thought it might be a good idea to get some support from the North Carolina barbecue society.

Trouble was, the state didn't have one. Early's immediate thought was that it most certainly should.



**Michael Hastings**

That thought remained tucked away in Early's mental file cabinet as he wrote a guide to the state's barbecue restaurants, *The Best Tar Heel Barbecue: Manteo to Murphy*, and a cookbook, *Jim Early's Reflections: The Memories and Recipes of a Southern Cook*. He also has kept busy organizing hunting trips, leading cooking classes and judging barbecue at festivals sponsored by the

Kansas City Barbecue Society, among others.

In short, Early has had a lot on his plate, and that's not counting his law practice in Winston-Salem.

Still, the idea that North Carolina needed a society dedicated to its most famous food stuck with him. And now Early has established the North Carolina Barbecue Society as a nonprofit corporation designed "to preserve North Carolina's barbecue history and culture and the old ways of doing things so younger generations can enjoy it," he said.

In Early's mind, North Carolina is the barbecue capital of the world, and it's about time we acted like it. Although the new society has just 60 members, Early has a lot of big plans.

He already has a logo, as well as certificates, cards and decals that come with membership. He's preparing his first newsletter, "The Squealer," which he plans to deliver by e-mail to members every other month, beginning in August. He is also planning a Web site. The address will be [www.NCBBQ-Society.com](http://www.NCBBQ-Society.com).

When the society really gets cooking, Early expects it to conduct cooking classes, give educational programs in schools, train judges, produce videos of prominent pit masters, and more.

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He would like to add two major festivals, one around Raleigh and one on the coast, to augment the already established Blue Ridge Barbecue Festival in Tryon and the Lexington Barbecue Festival.

He also has picked 25 barbecue places for a Historic Barbecue Trail across the state. He won't reveal the exact places, but he did say that the trail would cut through Winston-Salem as well as Lexington. He's looking into legislation that would allow highway signs to help travelers follow the trail.

The Lexington Barbecue Festival and T.W. Garner Foods, which makes Texas Pete, have become sponsors, and the board includes Jim Tabb, the organizer of the Blue Ridge Barbecue Festival.

Early wants to get 1,000 members in the next year — and he wants the society to bring together fans of all styles of barbecue. He knows that his plans are ambitious, but



he said that North Carolina is behind other states in efforts to promote and preserve its barbecue heritage.

"North Carolina has never had a barbecue society and we should have had the first," he said.

Early believes that the Plains Indians originally developed "low-and-slow" cooking techniques to help escape detection by

their enemies. That knowledge later migrated East to this area, he said, where other Indians taught early settlers, who then made the technique their own and created barbecue. "It's only a theory. But there's nothing to dispute it," Early said.

"This is the cradle of 'cue. We claim first in flight. Why not barbecue?"

Individual memberships to the North Carolina Barbecue Society cost \$35, or \$25 for seniors and students. People are also invited to join at \$75, \$150 and \$1,000 to further support the society.

For membership applications or more information, call 336-768-2547 or send an e-mail to [Jim@jimearly.com](mailto:Jim@jimearly.com).

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