



by Benton Vandiver III, OMICRON, USA

# A Tasty Hobby for Those with Patience

I was asked by Alex what hobbies I had, in particular anything that was out of the ordinary. I related a few of them to him and he zeroed in on the barbeque (BBQ) team that my wife I participated on in the Houston area.

### Biography

Benton Vandiver III received his BSEE from the University of Houston in 1979.

He was with Houston Lighting & Power for 15 years and Multilin Corp. for 4 years before joining OMICRON electronics where he is currently Technical Director in Houston, TX. A Professional Engineer, IEEE Member, and an active Z Krewe member (Galveston Mardi Gras krewe), he mainly enjoys spending time with his wife Julia and 2 year old daughter Jaclyn at every opportunity.



**Benton, the BBQ participant, shares with us some of his famous bar-beque recipes.**

### BBQ - a hobby?

First, it's not that unusual in Houston to cook BBQ (over 300 restaurants) and second it's down right popular as there are over 800 BBQ teams in the greater Houston area. A BBQ team is usually made up of a BBQ Pit, a 'head cook', and three to a hundred helpers. You might wonder how a hundred could actually cook, well they don't actually but the logistics for a BBQ Cook-off Competition for a corporate sponsored team needs a big group.

### A competition, you ask?

Yes, that is one of the driving forces for the popularity of BBQ in the state of Texas, plus the fun of participation. One guy says he can make the best tasting BBQ, and then someone else throws down the challenge. Next they each tell

two friends and well, you know the rest. They set the time and place and all of a sudden you have a BBQ Cook-Off!

These have become so popular over the years that they are used most often for charity fund raisers and there's an official organization that oversees the competitions, it's the International Barbeque Cookers Association. ([www.ibcabbq.org](http://www.ibcabbq.org))

The Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo, ([www.hlsr.com](http://www.hlsr.com) or [http://www.hlsr.com/et/bbqc/bbqc\\_index.aspx](http://www.hlsr.com/et/bbqc/bbqc_index.aspx)) is where they also host one the largest BBQ competitions in the state.

In 2008 the over 400 BBQ teams competed over two days and fed over 190,000 people coming to the cook-off & rodeo event. The amount of beef, chicken, pork, ribs, and other items that were cooked and consumed was staggering.

### So how did I end up on a BBQ team?

A close friend of ours asked for help about ten years ago when two of his team members (his sister & her husband) could not help out. Julia and I said, “*sure we’d be glad too, what time do you need us, where, and do I need to bring my Hibachi?*” (a very small grill)

He replied, “*Be at Sam’s Grill & Bar parking lot on Friday at 3pm, we’ll be finished about 2pm on Sunday. And here’s a picture of the ‘Pit’ we’ll use to cook on.*” (see Figure 4)

#### BBQ organization:

I first thought “*what have I committed too?*” Turns out a traditional BBQ Cook-Off requires a while to organize and execute.

- The BBQ pit has to come up to temperature.

- The fresh meats of each team have to be inspected and tagged by the judges to insure fairness in the competition, and it often takes twelve to fifteen hours to slow smoke a typical ten pound beef brisket till it’s done and ready to be served. (Ribs take five to six hours, chicken takes three to four hours.)

- So the whole process becomes a forty-eight hour project management effort to coordinate the cooking of the four typical categories (sometimes as many as seven categories) and have them at their tasty perfection precisely on the hour each one is required for submission to the judges.

And yes, this means all teams that are in the competition are doing the same thing.

So the larger the BBQ Cook-Off, the larger the logistics for the panel of judges to taste each team’s submission and come to a decision on who’s is the best!

Once we participated in the first cook-off, we were hooked and enjoyed each opportunity to help the team. It’s actually hot hard work but you get used to it because it’s focused. You have a specific goal and known time to get it completed. But at the same time there’s down time where you can visit and socialize with a great group of people with whom you build lasting relationships.

Over a few years our team developed into an efficient workgroup where each person knew their tasks

## The BBQ team sign!



and performed them like clockwork. Of course we had to have a team name, and ours was “**Coyote Cookers**”. (see CoyoteSign above) And in short order we had a run of success over a few years where we scored First Place in each category. (see awards in Figure 2)

We were lucky enough to pull it all together in a couple of competitions and place high enough to be the overall team winner twice. But the most memorable thing was our tag line, “**We eat the best and submit the rest!**” It was our way of saying that we couldn’t resist our own cooking and just couldn’t give it to the judges.

Many of the other teams agreed and we’d often have a large group over when the meats came off the pit. Our seven foot long pit was by no means large; some pits can be as big as an entire eighteen wheeler (over 38 feet long), but it’s enough to cook 14 briskets, 24 whole chickens, 16 full slabs of ribs, and even a few pork loins. That’s enough to feed a group of 300 people when you add in the sides, like cole slaw, potato salad and ranch beans.

#### Later Developments

About 4 years ago the team retired, mainly because our “head cook” took this all way too seriously and opened a very successful

## 2 Some of the Coyote Cookers’ awards for the four years of competitions



BBQ catering business in Houston. So successful he “retired” from his day job and within six months was financially secure.

So there was something to our tag line and many in the Houston area benefited from the years of practice in those BBQ cook-offs. Julia & I also came away with a lot of knowledge about cooking this way and what really made great BBQ.

Our favorite was and still is the BBQ Baby Back Ribs. (see Pit\_wRibs in Figure 3) These were so good we would often cook up extras to take home after the cook-off and feast for days. Then it wouldn't be long before we were eagerly anticipating the next cook-off date.

We still see the old team from time to time and fire up the pit to relive those great weekends.

I learned that the old adage, “Good things come to those who wait” has a lot of truth to it.

For really good BBQ you have to be patient. If you are really patient, you can learn a few cooking secrets. Each team develops their own style, but almost all do these as a minimum.

#### The Secret!

Here's THE cooking secret for great BBQ anything.

- Get a Pit with a separate fire box.

- Use real wood: oak for heat, mesquite or hickory for its flavor, and Sassafras (or Cinnamon wood) for a great natural BBQ taste.

- Keep the temperature between 275 F and 350 F, 300 F being optimum.

- Make sure you're producing enough smoke and never let flame touch the meat.

If you follow those guidelines, you can “BBQ” anything. Meats, fish, fowl and even vegetables.

If you have a traditional BBQ with charcoal or propane, then fire up one side to 350 F and cook on the no fire side.

Use water soaked hickory wood chips if possible to help create some smoke, but indirect heat is better than you think.

Recipes for almost anything can be found on the web nowadays. Google “Texas BBQ Recipes” for some great sites and tips on Texas BBQ.

My motive for joining the barbeque team was mainly for entertainment,

but the good food could be a reason for staying nine years with the Coyote Cookers.

#### The Final Secret:

“Rub” is the term for the spices applied to the meats, it can be either wet or dry. Both can yield excellent results. But it takes patience and experimentation to find that magic mixture that makes for a 1st Place Winner!

### 3 Famous “Coyote” barbeque ribs

### 4 The Coyote Cooker when new



Barbeque pits use indirect heat & smoke for BBQ - the Texas way. Try one of the recipes, you will enjoy it!



A Quality Pit of this type ranges from \$3000 - \$5000 USD.

