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Couple turn barbecue hobby into full-time restaurant work

Due South BBQ in Christiansburg offers South Carolina-style sauces and rubs.

By Hilary Smith



Gene Dalton | The Roanoke Times

Marie March

Despite their lack of background in the restaurant industry, Marie and Jared March saw a need for barbecue in the New River Valley and opened up their first restaurant, Due South BBQ.

The two came to the New River Valley from South Carolina where they both graduated from Clemson University with degrees in packaging science.

While living in South Carolina, barbecue became somewhat of a hobby and lifestyle for the couple. They would smoke pork at tailgates and on the weekends for "pig pickins."

"We would eat barbecue about two or three nights a week in South Carolina," said Marie March.

When the Marches came to Virginia so Jared March could attend the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, they were disappointed when they said they couldn't find a place with some good barbecue.

That's when the wheels started turning.

The couple found a vacant building on Roanoke Street in Christiansburg, purchased an Ole Hickory Pit brand cooker, which they had to drive to Missouri to pick up, and a few tables on eBay.

And Due South BBQ was born.

Marie March claims to be the business head of the team, crunching numbers and relying on the experience she gained when she owned a packaging company that she ran out of Charlotte, N.C.

She said Jared March is a perfectionist and is responsible for creating all of the sauces and rubs used in the restaurant.

"He enjoys coming up with good sauces and food," she said. "He's a good cook."

However, since neither of them has ever owned a restaurant or worked in restaurant management, Marie March gives a lot of credit to her manager, Lynn Epperly.

"She has so much experience," March said.

Epperly was previously the manager of the Pulaski Country Club and also operated a business from the Wilderness Inn in Pulaski. March said Epperly is responsible for keeping the place running and handling any glitches that they have come across since opening last month.

Even though she has plenty of experience she says it has still been an interesting learning process.

"I've never worked with an open pit cooker," Epperly said.

Since opening, the restaurant has done extremely well, March said.

"The demand was unexpected," she said. "We are slammed."

The place has been doing so well, in fact, that even though they have been fully filling the cooker they are still running out of meat in the evenings.

Epperly says that there has been such an overwhelming response that they have to cook meat seven days a week and 24 hours a day.

"It's been a challenge to get a system to get it all cooked," she said.

Some of their food distributors have suggested keeping frozen meat as a method of ensuring that they always have plenty on hand. But the quality of food is a top priority for the Marches.

"A lot of places buy pre-made meat but there's no way it'll taste as good as ours," Marie March said, "you won't get hickory-smoked pork any fresher."

The Marches purchase their meat daily from Wade's Supermarket.

Even though the business just opened, the Marches have big plans for the future. First, they would like to start hosting live music, especially bluegrass. Then the next step, Marie March said, is catering. Until they can get those things in motion they will be concentrating on the crowds pouring in.

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