

Eastern NC Pork Barbecue

By John Clarke

If you are new to eastern North Carolina, you may have heard by now that a small war rages between the eastern and western parts of the state over the proper way to prepare barbecue (it is a noun, not a verb, and it means pulled pork). Eastern style is a whole hog cooked low and slow over a bed of charcoal or wood, mixed with a vinegar sauce flavored with spices. Western style is most likely made with a shoulder or Boston butt, cooked over coals or gas with a tomato-based sauce made with vinegar, sugar and spices. Those from outside the area often will favor this sweeter sauce over the distinct tang of the eastern version. Sample a few sauces you can find at the grocery store, and once you find one you like, you are in for a treat if you stick to the low-and-slow method of cooking this meat.

Every year my wife's mother's family (the Williams Clan) has a family reunion, the location for which is rotated annually throughout the family. This event always features a whole hog cooked over charcoal to feed a group of more than 30 people. This past year it was our turn to host the weekend fun fest.

Local Power Squadron News

By JB Bagby

The United States Power Squadrons headquartered in Raleigh held the annual Change of Watch for District 27, which consists of 20 sail and power squadrons in the Carolinas. These range from the Fort Macon Sail and Power Squadron and others along the Crystal Coast to inland lake and river squadrons as far west as Charlotte and Winston-Salem. Over 150 members of 17 squadrons met at the DoubleTree oceanfront hotel in Atlantic Beach in March. Among the officers sworn in by USPS Vice Commander Craig Fraser was Pine Knoll Shores resident John E. ("JB") Bagby, who will serve as District Secretary. Other officers taking the oath of office were District Administrative Officer Greg Shay and District Treasurer David McMahan of Raleigh, Education Officer David Osmolski and Executive Officer Paula Stewart of Charlotte, and District Commander Gene Alligood of Pamlico.

Three squadrons in District 27 were among more than 350 squadrons named as finalists in the United States Power Squadrons Distinctive Civic Service Award. These were Lake Norman, Cape Fear and Fort Macon Sail and Power Squadrons. In order to be considered for this award, squadrons had to document their volunteer work, such as that of the Fort Macon squadron, whose members performed free vessel safety checks; taught public boating courses and seminars; and worked at the NC Maritime Museum, Webb Library, NC Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores and the Coast Guard Auxiliary. They performed other civic service functions, such as promoting National Safe Boating Week, and helped provide boating activities during Military Appreciation Day. Because no other district had three finalists, District 27 won Top District in the Distinctive Civic Service Award, sponsored by the BoatUS Foundation. Ted Sensenbrenner, assistant director of the foundation, remarked when he announced the award winner that, "The squadrons within D27 go far beyond their teaching duties in the classroom and demonstrating safe boating practices on the water. They have immersed themselves in their community through volunteer work and other charitable actions to assist those in need."

The secretary department under District Lieutenant Commander Bagby won the national Distinctive Communicator Award for the District 27 website at www.uspsd27.org, and for the newsletter, "Carolina BITTS," which is posted there. Sixteen squadrons were also recognized with this award, including Fort Macon.

Visit usps.org and select "Boating Courses and Seminars" for information on the local Fort Macon squadron's spring boating class schedule offered to the boating public, and to locate the nearest courses or seminars by your ZIP code. Visit usps.org/index.php/locate-a-squadron to locate a squadron in other areas, or visit usps.org/index.php/2015-05-08-10-34-31 to learn about vessel safety checks.

When we host the event, we usually order an 85 to 100-pound pig from Riggs Pork Market on Highway 24 near Croatan High School. They will ask you a few questions on how you want it prepared (head on or off, feet, etc.). When you pick it up, take along about a 120-quart cooler and a couple of bags of ice to cover the meat.

You will need to reserve a pig cooker (which can be towed behind your vehicle) from a local rental store. Country Aire Rentals in Morehead City usually has several, but call a few months ahead to reserve one. They will let you rent it on Friday and return it on Monday (cleaned, of course). I like to reserve the unit that comes with two racks to facilitate my system for turning the pig (more on that below).

Next you need to acquire six to eight 20-pound bags of charcoal and some hickory wood. Charcoal can be easily started with a chimney starter (under \$15 at Williams Hardware or Lowes), some newspaper and a long lighter. Let the charcoal turn grey on most sides and you are ready to get the pig started. Avoid using charcoal starter; it can give the meat a petroleum taste.

Preparing the pig. You will need another person to help you lift the pig out of the cooler. The pig should be coated with your favorite rub on the meat side (as opposed to the skin side). I like to also use mustard to help flavor the meat. The mustard burns off, but the spice within settles into the meat. The skin side is left up for most of the cooking time to allow the fat to cook and drip onto the coals for some delicious-smelling smoke.

Get that first load of charcoal going while you are seasoning the pig. This process takes time so if you want to be ready to eat around 5 p.m., you will most likely need to begin cooking at 7 a.m. I pour out the coals into a Weber Smokey Jr and then use a small flat blade shovel to lift and toss the coals onto the bottom of the cooker through the convenient side door vents. Keep the charcoal starter going so you have adequate hot coals to get your cooker up to a suitable temperature quickly. Now is also a good time to throw chunks of wood through the side vents and rake charcoal to them to burn. You can also presoak the wood to make it smoke more. Smooth out the charcoal so that it is positioned properly under the pig by using a long-handled hoe that fits easily into the door vent. Cluster the coals under the thickest parts of the pig; the ribs in the center need less heat than the thicker portions. I find that it's best to liberally load the surface with coals to start and then, as time progresses, you will need to add a bit less to keep the temperature where you want it.

About the temperature. Remember you want to cook the pig low and slow, meaning you keep the temperature between 220 and 260 degrees for the duration of the cooking process. Keep an eye on the temperature and adjust the vents or add charcoal as needed. There are also vents on the top of the cooker; keep them *slightly* open. The grill should come with a gauge, but you may want to add a second one to more carefully monitor the temperature. A meat thermometer is handy to test for doneness.

Avoid the temptation to take frequent looks at the meat. Each opening of the lid will drop your temperature by 50+ degrees, and it takes time to restabilize. Your guests may be curious and want to take a look. Take a few photos of the pig and show those.

If you started cooking around 7 a.m., you will be ready to turn the pig around 3:30. This part requires a little skill and two strong folks to lift the pig. You can tell when it is time to turn if the leg bones are loose (but do not pull them out). The slow cooking will have caused the cartilage to virtually dissolve, which makes for easy pulled pork. With your partner, grab that second cooking rack and place on top of the pig. Grab the handles of the racks by crossing your arms in an X formation over the handles on each end of the cook surface. Lift both cooking racks up and then turn the pig by uncrossing your arms. Settle the racks back onto the cook top for some additional cooking time. Remove the second rack.

This part of the day is what often gets referred to as the pig pickin'. The strong aromas make it difficult to resist sampling the pork—and a crowd will gather around the grill. Pull off the ribs and enjoy.

Sauce the pig with your liquid sauce, vinegar or otherwise, at this point. You will need to have at least a gallon (or two for insurance) to fully flavor all of the meat. You can pierce the top of the jug with an ice pick to help shake it on or pour it out into a sauce pan and then mop it onto the pig. Now is also a good time to check the internal temperature of the shoulders and butt—160 degrees is done and if you

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