

Midnight Burn picks up top BBQ prize



Kings Mountain Mayor Rick Murphrey congratulates Wayne Blessing and Kim Hicks, who led Midnight Burn to a Grand Championship. The pair also picked up first place in the chicken category. Photos by DAVE BLANTON



Kansas City Barbecue Society certified judges on a short break between categories Saturday

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Teams sauced the meat in their unique and confidential concoctions of spices, brines and rubs. Then they slow cooked pork ribs, pork butt, brisket and chicken for hours – sometimes overnight. When their best efforts were turned in to the picky and discriminating judges, one team emerged Saturday as the most all around talented at Saturday's 19th Annual Firehouse Cookoff.

"We're excited right now," said Wayne Blessing, who along with partner Kim Hicks led Midnight Burn to a Grand Championship and a \$4,000 check. "We felt like we had a very good cook this weekend."

A good cook indeed. The pair wowed judges, picking up first place in the barbecue chicken category, third place in pork, fourth place in pork ribs and tenth place in brisket. Hicks and Blessing own and operate Flat Rock Wood Room, a popular Hendersonville Restaurant. Saturday's big win marks their second grand championship; Midnight Burn grabbed its first top prize at a Kansas City Barbecue Society sanctioned event in Kentucky last year.

"We've been on the circuit for about eight years and this is what it's all about," Blessing said.

Rounding out the big winners over the weekend were Two Old Men and a Grill, a BBQ team based out of Bessemer City, which picked up the Grand Reserve Champion trophy and \$1,000 in prize money, and K&D Smokers, a cook team out of Winston-Salem, which came in third overall



Two Old Men and a Grill pitmaster Bob Roberts receives 1st place for pork ribs. Roberts was also the competition's Grand Reserve Champion.

out of the 41 competing squads.

The barbecue specialists pulled into town Friday, when they set up their gear and got settled in. Judges inspected the meat to ensure it wasn't pre-seasoned, brined or injected before the competition. Then the competitors spend hours trimming and prepping what they think will be the perfect cut of meat in the four categories they'll be judged in: pork, chicken, pork ribs and brisket.

"We'll spend all this money and time and equipment on one bite for a judge," said Big Show Cooking Team pitmaster Mat Griner said during Friday's preparation time. "You have to have a passion for it."

Come Saturday af-

ternoon, the teams turn in their best samples for judging. At that stage, a room full of KCBS-certified judges will work mostly in silence -- looking, smelling, tasting, chewing and finally mark a score from 1 to 9 for each sample they receive. Judging is blind: the identity of the team is kept obscured to the judges.

Open to the public every year at the walking track, the contest draws barbecue lovers from across the region. Many are looking for hints at the highly secretive recipes and techniques used by the competitive cooks. Others come for the fun atmosphere, which this year included live music by Kings Mountain's Oak Grove String Band.

"This is a great competition every year here in Kings Mountain," said Mayor Rick Murphrey. "It's the best barbecue in the world and everyone has a good time."

Other top place finishers, by category: Pork Ribs: Two Men and a Grill; Brisket: Sue E. Pigg, a cook team from Clemson, S.C.; Pork: Banjoman's BBQ, a cook team from Huntersville.



A judge scrutinizes the appearance of pork barbecue Saturday.

First place winners collected \$550 each.

Many of the competitors were familiar to each other. They compete on the same barbecue circuit and a large fraction of the teams at Saturday's cookoff were also at a contest the previous weekend.

The top-performing team originating out of Cleveland County was Grover-based Bite Me BBQ, which finished with an overall ranking of 23rd.

The Mayor's Choice award went to Holy Smoke BBQ, based in Ayden, N.C. That came with a \$550 prize.



Jay Henson, the pitmaster for Banjoman's BBQ collects his 1st place trophy in the pork category.

Customer Appreciation Day



Mayor pro tem Mike Butler, left, and city commissioner Keith Miller, right, welcome Norris McCleary to city hall. McCleary, a former NFL player for the Kansas City Chiefs and Seattle Sea Hawks, is in commercial real estate. The 6'4" McCleary played football seven years. Customers received mementos and refreshments and chatted with Mayor Rick Murphrey, City Manager Marilyn Sellers, and city council members. Photo by LIB STEWART

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Kings Mountain Weekend Weather

Thursday April 23	Friday April 24	Saturday April 25	Sunday April 26
Partly Cloudy - 73° 20% Chance of precipitation Night time Low 47°	Partly Cloudy - 70° 10% Chance of precipitation Night time Low 55°	T'Storms - 72° 80% Chance of precipitation Night time Low 49°	Showers - 70° 60% Chance of precipitation Night time Low 48°

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Commodities registration

Commodities registration at the Patrick Senior Center is Tuesday, May 5, Wednesday, May 6, and Thursday, May 7, from 9 a.m.-11 a.m. If you register during those days the commodities will be distributed on Wednesday, June 9, from 1-3 p.m.