

Master of the barbecue



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Don't ask Joe Hamel about his day job for the Department of Homeland Security. He doesn't want to talk about.

But ask him about barbecue and he lights up like fireworks over a Fourth of July cookout — one with really tasty meat, of course.

"I've never had a bad conversation about barbecue," the Glens Falls High School graduate said.

It seems he hasn't had a bad day behind the grill, either. The 35-year-old and his wife, Joelle, who live in Bel Air, Maryland, just rolled out their own line of barbecue sauce, Fat Daddy Joe's.

About six years ago, Hamel went to the Maryland State Barbecue Championship. He bought some sauces and rubs to try, chatted up competitors and a fire was lit.

The hobby barbecuer started playing around with recipes and soon, he was entered in a competition, alongside the likes of Myron Mixon, of "BBQ Pitmasters" fame.

"We knew everybody before they had their own TV shows," he said.

They kept entering competitions and meeting more barbecue big-shots "before barbecue was cool," Hamel laughed. "And we didn't come in dead-ass last."

When he came in sixth place in a competition, he told his wife it was time to buy a pick-up truck to transport smokers. When he hit seventh in a national tour stop, he convinced Joelle to buy a travel trailer.

"It has just kind of grown from there," he said.

On March 5, the couple's sauce took third place Barbecue Label at the National Barbecue Association's Annual Conference in Nashville.

"It would be good on a flip-flop," Hamel proudly said of the sauce. "It really shines on

ribs, really shines on brisket and steak, and it's really great on chicken.”

The Hamels are working with Mississippi-based The Shed Saucery to produce their sauce. Next, they hope to roll out a line of rubs.

“Our big thing is bringing the competition-proven products to people’s houses and helping the home cook to raise their game,” he said.

Hamel is talking with the creator of Sweet Baby Ray’s to learn the best ways to get Fat Daddy Joe’s on shelves.

This week, he’s meeting with regional economic development groups to find out how to market his product in the region and how to team with a local brewer to get the beer for his sauce.

While in town, he’s also firing up the smoker for a cause — an American Heart Association fundraiser Saturday at Schmaltz Brewing Co. in Clifton Park.

“We’re very excited to work with Joe,” said Shelby Schneider, marketing director at Schmaltz. “I’ve heard from everyone who knows him that his food is extraordinary.”

Hamel has hopes to someday make a career out of barbecue, but in the meantime, his focus is on fundraisers.

Having an outlet from his high-stress career is part of what Hamel loves about barbecue. He loves the camaraderie of the competition scene — he jokingly referred to it as “NASCAR for fat kids,” with good food, beer and whiskey.

But as his career path evolved from hands-on to more behind-the-scenes paper-pushing, Hamel has felt a need to contribute to the greater good in a more clear-cut way.

“I needed to make the world better and I do that through barbecue,” he said, talking about how he and Mixon brought South Korean dignitaries together over good meat and whiskey.

He spoke passionately about fundraisers for which he cooked and organizations he admires.

“Raise money for a good cause — that’s the kind of stuff we like to do with the business,” he said. “If I hit the lottery, I’d do that the rest of my life.”

Recipe

Joe Hamel is an award-winning barbecue master and owner of Fat Daddy Joe's

BBQ Sauces based out of Bel Air, Maryland. But sometimes, the Glens Falls native craves a taste of home.

He and his wife, Joelle, created a chili sauce as an homage to New Way Lunch's Dirt Dog. "We were on a mission," he said.

The sauce is good on burgers or hot dogs, he said, but he recommends it on a hot dog, topped with mustard and chopped onions.

Coney Island-style Chili Sauce

- 3 tablespoons vegetable shortening or bacon fat
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 tablespoon chili powder (spicy)
- 1 tablespoon cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon allspice
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1 pound lean ground beef
- 1/4 cup water (plus a little extra during the cook)

Saute onion in vegetable shortening or bacon fat until soft. Add spices, stir and cook for 1 minute. Add 1 pound lean ground beef and stir. Add 1/4 cup water and stir. Simmer on low heat for 2 hours, stirring occasionally, and adding additional water as needed.

On the web

To learn more about Fat Daddy Joe's BBQ Sauce and for recipes and tips on home barbecuing, log on to www.fatdaddyjoesbbq.com.