

PHOTOGRAPHS: MARY MARGARET CHAMBLESS



left: "Even if I won the lottery, I wouldn't miss these cook-offs for anything," says barbecue champion Byron Chism.

above: Byron and his sales manager, Robert Worsley, travel from the Florida Panhandle to numerous competitions—with the aim of winning.

From Texas to Florida

Byron, a Texas boy through and through, had already pledged his culinary talents to Southern cooking. In fact, he'd determined the site of a forthcoming restaurant in the Florida Panhandle. At the same time, he developed a seasoning rub for pork—and hit the road to sell his wares at barbecue cook-offs around the country.

"It's a serious product with a funny name—Butt Rub," he explains. "The guy who taught me to cook barbecue liked the Boston butt, and the seasoning's already known as a rub. My friends got a charge out of the name, and when I did research for the trademark, it was wide open."

Now, rather than opening the restaurant, Byron is offering his Butt Rub and its related products both on his Web site and at retailers nationwide. The site includes a store finder to connect barbecue aficionados with Byron's brainchild of a seasoning. ▶

Barbecue Champ

Byron Chism's barbecue rub and talent at the cooker make him a winner.

Graduating from a prestigious culinary school doesn't guarantee you'll win a barbecue competition. Byron Chism admits that truth with a good-natured laugh, describing his first steps into the hotly contested world of cook-offs.

Know, before you read on, that since 2001 Byron has been listed every year as one of the top 10 cooks designated by the Kansas City Barbecue Society, which is the largest sanctioned organization for the be-

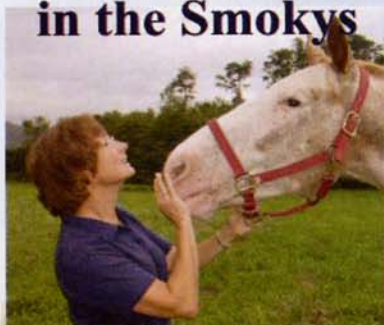
stowing of such honors. Know, too, that the field encompasses some 6,000 members. He's a true winner in the field—now.

"I thought these guys were just out there having fun," says the Culinary Institute of America grad. "I underestimated the talent out there. I didn't walk in and start winning. Barbecue is a cultural subset of the culinary world—and I took it as a challenge."

Cook-offs With Byron

To find his competition schedule, visit www.buttrub.com. He's been named grand champion or reserve grand champion 32 times in various contests, including number one wins in pork and brisket in the Kansas City Barbecue Society's national ranking.

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Tour Events

"If the USDA calls the pork shoulder a butt, we can too," Byron says, further defending the name that defines his business. "I call my competition schedule the Tour De Butt. I get kidded, but I keep smiling."

He's having fun, racing off to two or three competitions a month from his home in Santa Rosa Beach. When he gets in place, with his cooker intact and ready to rev, Byron turns as serious as a culinary student perfecting the classic soufflé. His competition goes far beyond the Boston butt. "I compete in four categories—chicken, ribs, pork shoulder, and beef brisket," he explains. "Brisket has become my specialty in the last few years, but you must compete in all four to be eligible for the grand championship."

The formal education—and the time spent in restaurants from here to New York City—isn't as handy as you'd think. "I've learned to relax, but it didn't start out that way," explains the 'cue champ. "In my culinary years, everything was up-tempo, and you're used to not standing still."

Going the Distance

"Barbecue cook-offs are marathon deals. You're cooking something for 16 to 18 hours, and you must pace yourself," he continues. "Relaxing is an advantage. You stay poised and



above: Byron readies the meat for delivery to the judges. **below:** "All the ingredients are listed on the Butt Rub label," he says of his popular seasoning. "It's a real basic blend of onion, garlic, salt, pepper, and a little bit of heat."



Here's The Rub

Byron's Web site (www.buttrub.com) includes an online catalog of his products—from the Butt Rub itself to seafood seasoning, barbecue-seasoned roasted peanuts, various bottles of specialty honey, and novelty T-shirts. The classic rub runs \$4 for a 4.5-ounce jar.

The site also includes select recipes for steaks, spiced pecans, grilled catfish, fish stew, grilled shrimp, pork loin, burgers, fried chicken, and more.

Byron's advice to would-be champs: "Use Butt Rub or any other product generated by a championship cook," he says. "Who knows more about barbecue—somebody who competes or some guy with a tie in New Jersey? Champions tend to make the best products—and as long as people enjoy cooking, they'll get better at it."



above: The cooking's done; judging comes next.

“Barbecue cook-offs are marathon deals. You’re cooking something for 16 to 18 hours, and you must pace yourself.”

Byron Chism, barbecue champion

stay focused. You get a rhythm going with the art of barbecue.”

There’s a method to the art. “It’s a balancing act of wood, seasoning from the rub and the baste, the right type of cooker, salt, and a little bit of heat—nothing needs to be out of sync,” Byron says. “The judges are looking for meat

that’s tender but not overcooked. They are impressed with depth of flavor.”

Having won the “majors,” will Byron stay home to conjure up more products for his fans? “I’m proud to be on the top,” he says with a touch of modesty. “But I’m not through competing yet. I feel like I’m just getting started.”