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Bear Down Barbecue brings smoked meat, labor of love to Frankfort



The Power Sweeping Pulled Pork Sandwich (\$7.25), which is smoked for 13 hours, is one of Riggins' favorites on the menu and can be topped with his homemade cole slaw for a \$1 upcharge. Photos by James Sanchez/22nd Century Media

James Sanchez, Contributing Editor
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Rashid Riggins got started in the food industry by parking his trailer smoker at carnivals all throughout Will, DuPage, Kane and Cook counties for three years before he and his fiancé, Marsha, recently opened Bear Down Barbecue & Catering Company in Frankfort.

As unconventional a path as that may seem to some, Riggins looks at it as the traditional route.

“Pitmasters cook under the sun,” Riggins said. “Where would you get the opportunity to cook under the sun if not for outdoor events? I’m not a culinary French chef. I’m not making French cuisine, Asian cuisine, European cuisine. I’m a pitmaster. I’m smoking meat. That’s generally done under the sun. ... It was a perfect progression as a pitmaster.”

Riggins went from barbecuing on his \$40 grill from Kmart to having six smokers and grills on his backyard deck. And inside Bear Down lies his most recent purchase — a 2-ton smoker — which permeates the air in the parking lot outside of the restaurant, tucked inside the Frankfort Town Center off LaGrange Road.

More than 300 pounds of meat could be placed in Riggins’ rotisserie smoker, and cooked with his preference of cherry and oak wood. A cut that will always hit the rack is a St. Louis spare rib Riggins prepares with a foiling process.

While most barbecue joints expose their ribs on the smoker from start to finish, Riggins takes them out after three-and-a-half hours, reapplies a coat of his pork rub, and bastes it with a spray mixture of apple cider vinegar and other ingredients he will not divulge. Then, he wraps them in foil before putting them back on the smoker for a few more hours.

“It gives the chance of another layer of flavor, while making the rib more tender,” he said of the foiling process.

The labor of love also is put into his pork shoulder for the Power Sweeping Pulled Pork Sandwich (\$7.25). The meat consists of the secret rub and an injection of a savory pork marinade, before hitting the smoker for 13 hours. The meat is pulled to order, while simmering in a vat of its own juices, and can be topped with a traditional homemade coleslaw for \$1 more.

It is only fitting that the Chicago Bears-themed restaurant opened in the midst of the

NFL's preseason. The first thing one will notice after the aroma is that each side of the wall is draped with Bears' decor and signed memorabilia, from Mike Singletary to Dan Hampton, Brian Urlacher to Willie Gault and Devin Hester.

"This isn't just for show," Riggins said, pointing at the walls. "You ask me a question about the Bears, I'll know it, because I love the Bears like I love barbecue."

His culinary journey began with preparing meals weekly for friends and family in his neighborhood before Bears games, which inspired the restaurant's theme.

"My two passions were tied together immediately," he said. Fridays, I would be getting antsy and go to the store and pick out the perfect things to serve for the Bears game. That's where it all began, and it went on to me being on my deck cooking six days a week."

Now, it has evolved to owning his own restaurant, and it hasn't all soaked in just yet, he said. Years of trial and error — as well as studying pitmasters from all regions — have paid off. A lot has changed since he wore a shirt and tie, working human resources for the City of Chicago. Now, he puts on gloves and an apron to cook barbecue for the masses.

"Oprah calls it an 'a ha' moment," Riggins said. "This thing has been in my brain and in my dreams, and it's never been in reality. So to walk in here and see what I envisioned is pretty awesome. But then your brain instantly goes to making it a success."

Other dishes not to miss ...

- The Blitzing Bear Down BBQ Sundae (\$10.25) is the ideal meal on the go. A 16-ounce cup is filled with two layers of Bear Down's signature cowboy beans and coleslaw, pulled pork or chicken, and topped with a signature barbecue sauce.
- Riggins said the Grizzly Bear Down Beef Burger (\$12.25) "is something you have to loosen your belt for." A 6-ounce Angus beef patty is seasoned, grilled to order and topped with smoked pulled pork, thick-cut bacon and barbecue sauce. Lettuce, tomato, pickles and onions are optional.

Bear Down Barbecue & Catering Company

20857 S. LaGrange Road in Frankfort

Hours

- 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

- Closed Sunday & Monday

For more information ...

Web: www.facebook.com/beardownbarbecue

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