

Smokin' Prize-Winning BBQ is Dale Lockwood's Trademark!

By George Moses

Dale Lockwood is a legend around Livingston County with his Hickory BBQ and Grill. He sets up at different locations each day. On Tuesday & Wednesday he's in Brighton at the corner of Old US-23 and Spencer Rd. in front of The Beverage Cellar. On Thursday and Friday he's in Howell in front of Marcy's Cleaners and he's also set up on Thursday in South Lyon on Pontiac Trail between 9 and 10 Mile Roads in front of Toarmina's Pizza.

I stopped at his roadside BBQ stand at the corner of Old 23 and Spencer Rd., attracted by the aroma of the hickory smoked meats he had in the cooker. I watched as they pulled out a rack of juicy ribs, a beef brisket and a pan of pulled pork.



Lockwood cuts open a tender smoked beef brisket just after removing it from the slow cooker.

"Hickory BBQ & Grill is the catering side of my business," said Lockwood. "And then Daley's Detroit Style BBQ is all of my sauces and all my rubs and all my prepared meats that you can buy in stores. I have 5 sauces and 4 rubs. We have prepackaged ribs, brisket, pulled pork and pulled chicken that's sold in supermarkets and meat delis, pizza stores. The Toarmina's Pizza chain uses our ribs exclusively."

So, you can go to Simply Fresh Market, Brighton Market or Marv's Meats and buy Dale's BBQ sauces. If you buy Dale's ribs at a local store they are pre-cooked and pre-sauced at his certified, licensed manufacturing facility. "You just heat 'em up. Takes about 10 minutes on your grill."

Lockwood is doing a brisket business at his locations. He's been at the US-23/Spencer Rd. spot for 2 years.

Asked how he got started in this business, Lockwood explained, "Well I grew up in a large family. My dad had a tumor on his brain, so when he went in the hospital, I basically did all the cooking for the family. I started my love of cooking way back. I remember climbing up on a step stool making breakfast for my dad. And then, when he got sick, I did all the cooking for the family. Then, I went to a vocational school in Lapeer County. I did the full course there and graduated top of my class in that. At the same time I worked for a catering company up in that area. Every weekend I would do catering all weekend long. I've always like to cook, and so I took that love for cooking and went to school for it. During my senior year in 1989 I met my wife and we got married in '90. Then I felt like I needed a real job. There's not a lot of money in cooking at a young age, so I went into the construction business because that's where there was better money. I ended up starting my own construction business and I had

that for 14 years. As the economy began to tank in Michigan I went back to doing what I love. I bought a small grill and I started the catering business. That was in 2006. I've been doing it ever since. It's just taken off. I started down in Westland, joined the Chamber and started getting jobs through the Chamber. As you know out here I'm a Chamber member at both Brighton and Howell. I try to be as active as I can with the Chambers. I feel like that's a strong key to success. It's amazing."

Lockwood and his staff are booked for events and parties every weekend until the snow flies. "Last year and this year the weddings have taken off like never before," said Lockwood. "I think people are tired of going to venues and getting average food and the high price of the venue. And then you're forced to use their liquor. Nowadays, with the tents that you can get you can do a backyard event for half the cost, still make it a nice event. So we've almost tripled our wedding business."

"We have 3 units, so we can do 3 events at the same time on Saturdays and we do 2 on Sundays. And probably next week I'll be ordering my 4th rig. It's all about staff. This year I feel comfortable sending out 3 different crews. Even though we're roadside people, it's important to me, the cleanliness of not just my rigs but my guys. These guys are wearing chef shirts at a roadside stand. They're not wearing cutoff t-shirts. That's important to me. And I

think that's what's helped us to be successful. In a business that's typically very dirty and greasy, I think we stand out because we are so clean. You eat with your eyes first. What it looks like is part of your image. This is my restaurant. I have to do the best I can with what I have out here. I planted these flowers because this was an empty flower box. Let's make it look nice."

Hickory BBQ & Grill is obviously known for their barbeque. They've won the Taste of Livingston the last 2 years in a row. They've won the Smokin' Jazz & BBQ Blues Festival the last 2 years in a row with their ribs. But Lockwood believes his beef brisket is the best in Michigan.

"Probably what we sell the most of is pulled pork, quite frankly. This week alone we'll probably go through 500 lbs of pulled pork. We just slow smoke it for about 14 hours, use our own dry rubs I've developed. And then our briskets go between 12 and 16 hours. So it's very labor intensive. A lot of love goes into it but we cook it low and slow. That's our motto," says Lockwood.

I asked Dale how he came up with his trademark rubs and sauces. Unsurprisingly, the process was simply a lot of trial and error. "I've always been good at figuring out the flavor profile of things. I used to buy every rub on the market. And I'd buy every cookbook on building rubs. I can read recipes and I start to see how they're put together. So I took what I like about this and I took what I like about that and I started building my own rubs. We went through generations of rubs. I kind of like a more spicy rub, but the general population prefers something less spicy. So we've developed rubs that fit that sweet spot that satisfies most people. That's the business part of cooking. I could put out a sauce that I love, but if it doesn't sell then it's no good. So there is a happy medium there. I have a very close knit group of friends that I have over when I try new recipes and they're ruthless! But I appreciate that. I want their honesty," says Lockwood.

He has 5 sauces on the market right now: apple, cherry, a hot sauce that's sweet with a late heat, a mustard, which is a mix between a Georgia and a South Carolina sauce. And then there's the original, which won the Best Sauce in Detroit in 2008 at the Ribs & Soul Festival. He went up against 13 of the area's best rib guys from all around



The 5 prize-winning barbecue sauces Sold under the Daley's trademark.

Detroit. "I was the first person ever to win both the best ribs and the best sauce at that event. We're really proud of that. For me that was like winning the Super Bowl or the Stanley Cup. That's really what kicked off our products. That was the first time in my life that I realized that I know what I'm doing and I know that I'm good at something. And then we've continued to win since then. Almost everywhere that we compete, we win," says Lockwood.

Asked why he markets his sauces under the Daley's name, Lockwood explained that most of his friends always call him Daley. He wanted something that was more marketable than Hickory BBQ & Grill. Daley's just had a ring to it. So any of his products that you would buy in a store is under the Daley's label, whether it's his sauces, rubs or packaged ribs. So, Dale has 2 businesses.

Daley's is the packaged products he sells through retail outlets

and Hickory BBQ & Grill is the catering and roadside stand business. "And at our roadside and catering locations we use exclusively Daley's products," explained Lockwood.

"I love Livingston County. I love the people, the township and the city. The health inspectors out here are amazing. On a government level they're real accommodating and I just appreciate them. It's amazing how great they are to work with," says Lockwood.

He's proud to be a "local" who lives here and works here and supports many local charities and sports teams and whatever he can to support the area. "Because I have competition that's from out of town that take the money out of the community. And I do what I can to support our area. I'm not just here to make a dime. I'm here to make a lifelong business in this area."

Just before leaving I asked Dale if he's planning any big changes in his business for the future. "No. I could see myself doing this 'til I'm 80. I love everything about this business!"

I took a generous amount of Lockwood's brisket, ribs and pulled pork to the guys at my poker game that evening and all agreed that everything was incredibly melt-in-your-mouth tender, juicy and delicious!



Dale Lockwood and his cooks display pulled pork, beef brisket and barbecued ribs ready to go!

**Call for your full service onsite whole hog roast quote or with any questions about locations of Hickory BBQ's roadside stands. (734) 673-8889
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