

## Local Chef Tests Cooking Skills around the Country



*Chef Dave Salm stirs barbecue sauce over a stove in his kitchen at Al Corso.*

A small-town chef is looking to make a big impact by testing his hard-earned cooking skills in barbecue competitions across the country.

Dave Salm, owner and chef of al corso in Collins, recently began competing with a team of grill gurus in Kansas City Barbecue Society barbecue competitions all over the United States.

“From a chef’s standpoint, competition is fun, but it’s also the most humbling thing a chef can do,” Salm said. “Everybody can cook barbecue well, until you get judged. Then, you see how good you are.”

Salm got the idea to compete after attending a barbecue competition on vacation and bringing the idea home.

“Mark Crass from Red Arrow and myself were kind of collaborating to see how we could compete in this,” Salm said. “I knew from the very beginning that I wanted to compete.”

With this inspiration as a guide, Salm and about six other barbecue masters joined forces to form a team, “Legends of Smoke, Team Red Arrow.” The group is sponsored by Red Arrow, a Manitowoc-based business that specializes in manufacturing cooking flavors and liquid smoke.

“They have a lot of professionals at Red Arrow that really know what they’re doing,” Salm said. “So, we’re trying to use that advice with my knowledge of cooking, and trying to compete in this barbecue world.”

Salm and his crew of barbecue experts have already traveled around Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Oklahoma and Tennessee since beginning their first competition season in April.

To have a chance against some of the exceptionally skilled cooks at these large-scale competitions, the team often relies on Salm’s long history of cooking to guide them in the right direction.

Salm essentially grew up in a kitchen, watching his parents run their own restaurant throughout his childhood. With a fervor for food ingrained in him from a young age, Salm attended culinary school at Fox Valley Technical College in Appleton and afterward went on to work at his father’s restaurant.

Fostering years of experience under his belt, Salm made the move to open his own restaurant, al corso, with his wife eight years ago in the tiny town of Collins.

“We just felt there was a need for dining here,” Salm said. “Our initial goal was to just to do catering from out here, but it branched into upper scale, fine-dining with wines, whiskey and food.”

Though cooking up barbecued meats for a competition and serving full meals in a fine-dining establishment certainly require different skill sets, Salm has learned to take tips from each practice and apply them to the other.

“I draw my experience from years of being in a restaurant to barbecue through cooking different meats,” Salm said. “I think that helps a lot to understand the biology of meats, the proteins and how that all affects cooking.

“What we have taken from barbecue and brought into the restaurant, is that we are beginning to do a lot more smoking for the restaurant,” he said.

As Salm became more comfortable barbecuing, he introduced smoked buffalo tenderloin, smoked duck and smoked lamb shanks to al corso’s menu. Soon after, this turned into a whole new business venture for the seasoned chef: a catering service called Belly Barbecue.

“With Belly Barbecue, we barbecue meats for people, either for delivery or pick-up,” Salm said.

Belly Barbecue began catering to Collins and its surrounding areas in May 2015, and Salm said people seem to be enjoying the service so far.

“Our customer base is very interested in barbecue, to the point where we will probably have a day just doing barbecue out here (at al corso) for one night,” he said.

As for the future, Salm plans to keep sharpening his barbecue skills in the hopes of one day making it big.

“We’re going to keep competing with Red Arrow as a team, and hopefully our goal is to be on TV someday, and to beat the champions that are out there,” Salm said.

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Red Arrow is a market leader in the production of Condensed Natural Smoke flavors, savory Cooking Method Flavors and food browning agents. The company creates authentic, all-natural and environmentally friendly flavor solutions that allow professional chefs to develop signature foods and dishes. Red Arrow, headquartered in Manitowoc, Wis., for 58 years, has production facilities in Manitowoc and Rhinelander, Wis.