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Family's barbecue tradition still smoking

Barbecue is family tradition

By Kathryn Jones
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Yes, there really is a Joe Morley.

He's a "Midvale loyalist" who has owned and operated Joe Morley's Smoked Beef and Bar-B-Q since 1985.

Brent Morley, Joe's son, credits his father for keeping the Midvale restaurant at 100 W. Center St. going for so long.

"We started with literally my mom and dad in the kitchen," Brent said. "And now we've got 30 to 35 employees - [whom] we love. It's not a huge, massive company, but for a guy who just started it on his own, I think it's pretty remarkable."

Keeping up with his father isn't easy for Brent. No matter how early he gets to the eatery, his dad is already there. Brent's work typically starts about 7 a.m.,

although the smoking ovens at the barbecue are working around-the-clock.

"It takes four hours for the ribs and chicken," Brent said. "The beef we smoke for 14, and that means overnight."

Brent has been laboring at Morley's since he was a sixth-grader, washing dishes and waiting and busing tables, among other things. He's glad he now shares the load with Joe.

Ten years ago, the Morley family beefed up the restaurant's size. The place now boasts an eating area with Western décor that seats 150 to 200 diners. It also features a new dining room, capable of seating up to 80 guests for business luncheons, wedding breakfasts and other special events. The kitchen is large enough for the restaurant and the family's catering business.

Joe Morley's daughter-in-law redesigned the restaurant's interior, adding some landscape photos shot by her father-in-law. Brent pitched in with the interior painting. People are always asking if family members plan to open a second barbecue joint.

"Joe has always been hesitant to do that because he likes to be able to control everything, and part of [that is maintaining] the quality," Brent said.

Morley Sr.'s first "real job" was working for Church's Fried Chicken, but when the company went out of business three years later, he opened Morley's Fried Chicken, later closing the place in favor of the current business.

"When we opened, we were about the only thing on this end of the valley," Brent said. "We've watched a lot of places come and a lot of places go, and I think with [dad] being involved, he's kept a handle on it, kept the quality high and I still think it's one of the cheapest places you can eat."

Joe Morley's doesn't have a grand menu. There's not a lot to choose from, but the mouthwatering choices inspire many to come back for a second meal.

"We love this place," said Marcy Fetzter, an Indiana resident and frequent visitor. "We always try to make it when we're here in town."

Courtney Mamas, a server at Joe Morley's for the past year, likes her job.

"Joe treats me good," she said.

Russ Morley, Joe's brother, doesn't work at the family business but likes to drop in.

"The ribs are my favorite," he said. "I love the seasoning, and there's plenty of meat on them. I like the barbecue on the side."

The restaurant's menu includes beef, pork, chicken and ribs. Brent advises diners to start with the beef and work their way down the menu. After all, the place's prices are reasonable.

"You can feed a family of four on 20 bucks," Brent said.

Getting there, though, may prove a bit of a challenge.

"It's not a bad, horrible location, but it's not high-profile either," Brent said.

Joe Morley's hasn't invested in a flashy neon sign, so finding the place takes watchful eyes. For many regulars, however, Joe Morley's has become their secret spot - a secret they willingly share with friends.

Grill in Midvale

Joe Morley's is at 100 W. Center St. (7720 South), Midvale. The restaurant is open Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Fridays and Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; closed Sundays.



Nate Morley checks on smoked chicken at Joe Morley's Smoked Beef and Bar-B-Q in Midvale. (Kathryn Jones)



Food server Rachel Hamblin and manager Brent Morley await customers at Joe Morley's Smoked Beef and Bar-B-Q. (Kathryn Jones)