

Musician-Turned-Chef Caters to OC

Bradley Balch relishes new gig as neighborhood's unofficial personal cook

By Silver Hogue

Staff Writer

That intoxicating aroma curling its way through Kessler Park's Windomere Avenue is likely coming from the backyard of one of the neighborhood's best kept secrets.

Eight years ago, chef Bradley Balch was living his dream of performing before large crowds of music lovers at guitar fests, such as Larry Joe Taylor's annual Texas Music Festival.

With his love of acoustic melody, ability to play by ear, and an album, *Transitions*, to his credit, Balch said he thought he'd found his calling — until he decided to help out with the festival barbecue.

"I had always played at these country music festivals that

combined great Texas music with great Texas cooking," Balch said. "I started getting really interested in different kinds of barbecue grills and smokers and started experimenting with brisket, ribs, ham, chicken, and sausage. One day I was asked to man the smoker all day at a festival because people were asking for me — that was the turning point."

Balch's claim to fame is the one-of-a-kind sauces he created to complement his meats. His first foray into the art of sauce, aptly named Sweet Zing BBQ Sauce, became so popular at festivals that friends began suggesting he bottle his lightning and sell it to the masses.

"My music festival friends



Chef Bradley Balch of Kessler Park shows off some of his barbecue sauces.

STAFF PHOTO: CHELCEY ADAMI

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were the ones that encouraged me to attend culinary school," Balch said. "I'm a chef today because I was a musician first."

In January 2005, Balch enrolled at Aims Academy culinary school in Carrollton and officially earned his crisp white hat and chef designation in April 2006.

Since graduation, Balch has turned most of his focus on perfecting and market-

ing his popular sauce and creating a reputation for himself in Oak Cliff. During the day he serves as part of the culinary team at Harris Methodist HEB Hospital in Bedford, and much of his free time is spent providing "unofficial personal chef" services for many residents throughout his neighborhood.

"He's cooked at two parties at our home," said Patricia Reich, an Oak Cliff resident. "One was a gorgeous pizza party, and the other one was a paella dinner. Paella is a

very difficult Spanish dish to prepare, and that night we had a lot of family in from Spain. It was a major challenge, and he ended up receiving rave reviews from our family and friends. You really can't go wrong with him."

While Balch said he enjoys preparing his clients' favorite dishes, he is working on making his own dishes more diet-friendly.

"I have a diabetic friend who loves my sauce but wanted me to make it with a sugar alternative," Balch

said. "After several experiments, I came up with my Lean Mean BBQ Sauce and Lean Mean Ketchup that are specially formulated for people who want to limit their carbohydrates and sodium."

Balch has casually sold his sauce in bottles and boxes, priced between \$5 and \$60, for years, but he officially launched his products in September 2007. Since then several area stores have begun carrying the sauce, such as Roy's Natural Market and Seigal's on Belt Line

Road.

"I met Chef Bradley when he was catering a lot of the parties at a hotel I was working for in Mesquite," said Mindy Manning, an Oak Cliff resident and long-time client. "My husband and I love his brisket wraps and turnovers, and we buy his Sweet Zing BBQ Sauce by the box. My husband won't let us run out of it. I haven't found anything that compares to it on the grill."

While Balch says he's enjoying his newfound success as a chef, music is still

alive in his life. In his festival poster-lined office — which provides easy access to his backyard smoker — Balch keeps his guitar close at hand, in case a musical mood strikes him.

"My next album is going to be called *Realization*," Balch said. "It says a lot about where I am at this point in my life and where I want to go."

For information about Balch and his recipes, visit chefbradley.net.

E-mail silver.hogue@peoplenewspapers.com



Bradley Balch with his special sauce that will be sold by the local museum

Fond memories

Recognized chef's sauce to aid place where he visited as a child

While growing up, summers for

By **LARRY KENNEDY**

Messenger Asst. Publisher/News Editor

Bradley Balch meant spending several weeks in Gatesville with his grandparents and other family members.

Now that he has become an accomplished chef, Balch decided to give something back to the community that held so many fond memories of his childhood.

Chef Bradley, as he is known in the Dallas area, developed a sauce that will be sold exclusively at the Coryell Museum and Historical Center. He was in town last week to deliver the first boxes of the Silver Spur BBQ Sauce to the museum's gift store.

"It is really good with red meats and pork," Balch stated.

Balch, the grandson of Rabon and Mabel

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Balch and the nephew of Talou Edwards and Regina Baize, all of Gatesville, said the sauce has a nice balance—not too sweet and just enough chipotle peppers to give it a "kick."

He has always considered Gatesville his second home, where he spent summers attending Sunday School at the First United Methodist Church, going to youth camp and playing basketball or football with his cousins.

"One time when blackeyed peas were in season, Talou had us shucking peas," he recalled.

"She had bushels of them. It was a fond memory, but not as fond as others."

Most of his adult life has been spent in sales and marketing, and he also dabbled in music. It was while attending music festivals that others began to take notice of his passion and ability in the culinary arts.

"I've always loved to cook; my mom's a really good cook," Balch said. "As I got older I began to experiment in the kitchen, and when I went to Texas A&M, I worked as a cook."

A retired chef, George Roof, took notice of Balch's love of cooking and began encouraging him to attend a culinary arts school. Eventually, Balch took his advice and enrolled at Aims Academy in Dallas. He graduated in February 2005 and soon became a chef at Harris Methodist H-E-B Hospital in Bedford.

He also does private catering and would eventually like to become a full-time caterer and private chef.

"I finally found my calling and once I went to school, it was like a duck to water," Balch said.

In addition to the Silver Spur sauce, Balch has developed two other sauces and a ketchup that he is beginning to market. He has the Sweet Zing BBQ Sauce, Lean Mean BBQ Sauce and Now That's Ketchup.

Both the Lean Mean and Now That's Ketchup are low on carbohydrates—even lower than recommended by the American Diabetes Association of Dallas.

Balch is scheduled to be at the museum on Sept. 20 for the annual Spurfest. Taste samples of his products will be available at that time.

For more information on Chef Bradley, visit his website at www.chefbradley.net.