

## Episode 3 Barbeque and Branding

[Intro with Music] Come join us, explore the impact of small business here in rural Arkansas.

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What challenges would you face? Who can help you meet those challenges? How do you get in touch with others like you?

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This is Create Bridges, Arkansas, and we invite you to come cross these bridges with us.

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Well, today, we're on the Career Bridges podcast series, Arkansas Small Business, Big Rural Impact, and I'm UA Cossatot Media Director, Loren Hinton.

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[Loren] Thank you for joining us. Today, we're sitting down with Murriel Wiley, who is the Program Coordinator for the 3Cs region,

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along with Matt Gilley [How's it Going?] of Big Gilley's Smokehouse LLC in Asheville.

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Today's episode is all about Barbecue and Branding, as we'll be discussing marketing for rural restaurants.

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[Murriel] Thank you so much, Loren. And we appreciate everyone out there for joining us.

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And we really just wanted to sit down and discuss these small businesses and hey, everything that's going on, the big Gilley's is a big deal, [Loren] Matt,

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as a small business in a rural town, Big Gilley's hosts customers from Ashdown and Little River County, as well as the surrounding areas.

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But one thing both local residents and tourists passing through have in common is the desire to find really good food.

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[Matt] Yes, [Loren] we all love to eat regardless of where we're from or where you're going and

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I think we can all agree we enjoy eating well and having a good time with family and friends.

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So today we're going to explore what goes into creating a product that draws in a wide range of customers and

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the ways that product is branded. So, Matt, give us the rundown of the background of Big Gilley's Smokehouse.

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[Matt] Well, first of all, thank you for having me. It's an honor to be here. Second of all, I've been smoking meat for years.

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Next thing you know, everybody kept telling me it was good. And I kind of thought,

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you know, maybe it's just my buddies telling me it's good.

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And then other people started telling me it was good and I thought we might have something here.

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I was living down in Fort Worth. I ran a welding business down there. Still doing it, then started smoking meat on the side. Started selling at ten dollars a plate.

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The next thing you know, it got a lot bigger, a lot bigger.

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I moved back here and when I moved back here, I decided to go ahead and hone in on it and get everything as perfect as I could get it.

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You know, the port butts, chicken, the ribs and especially the brisket.

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I'm a firm believer that if you don't have a good brisket, you don't even really need to be a barbecue shop.

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That's just me right there. So a little bit of background on it.

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We've been doing this Big Gilley's Smokehouse style for about two years. We're a food trailer in Ashdown right across the road from Big Jakes.

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That's actually kind of a blessing right there. I believe that competition is everything.

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And when you're right there across from 'em, come on with it [Loren] complement each other.

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[Matt] Absolutely. Back and forth. We're kind-of in the center of town. A lot of people passing through.

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We've had people from all over. You know, when it comes to the background of us,

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I love to cook. And like you said earlier, who doesn't love to eat. [Murriel] I don't know anybody who doesn't love good flavor.

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[Matt] Food brings people together.

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[Loren} You're right. [Matt] You know, I mean, even, you know, these trying times that we're going through right now.

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I've never seen anybody mad eating a brisket sandwich. You know, it just, it doesn't happen. [Loren] You ought to put that on a t-shirt.

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[Murriel] How can you be mad eating a brisket? [Matt] That's it, that's it. 3:00

[Murriel] But I do want to touch on something as far as the size of Ashdown. 3:04

And you guys being in a rural area. I know 3:09

in a big city you're going to have guaranteed foot traffic and a large population that's going to be coming into your restaurant. 3:12

But you guys are in a small location. [Matt] We are. 3:18

[Murriel] What challenges have you faced being in a small town and what have you done to overcome some of those challenges? 3:20

[Matt] Every one of that you could find. You know, whenever you start a business, you're going to have a lot of nay-sayers. 3:26

That's part of it. Why would you start a business in Ashdown, when there's forty-five hundred people there. Why wouldn't you just go ahead and go to Texarkana. I'm not from Texarkana and I'll make that very appararent. 3:32

I am from Ashdown. I'm from Little River County. When I was down in Dallas Fort Worth for all those years, they would ask me, "Hey, where are you from?" 3:36

I'm from Ashdown. Where's that? 20 miles from Texarkana. A lot of people will come in and pass through Ashdown and 3:43

not really, you know, it's it's not really something that's quote unquote "on the map", but we've had some really, really good times. 3:49

We've had some not so good ones also. 3:56

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The main thing about it is staying steady, like we was talking about, you know, the social media and stuff like that.

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That's one way that we've overcome a lot is branching out through Facebook.

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Instagram, used to do Twitter, anything like that.

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Branding. I go door to door and drop off menus.

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I mean, we've done anything and everything you can think of.

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[Murriel] And I know you'll have a Web site, too, for any one, maybe when you find your Facebook page with a link to the menu.

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So you can see that menu on the Web site. [Matt] All you really have to do is put a #BigGilleysSmokehouse on Facebook or Instagram.

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It'll pop up a lot of things we have on our menu. Our Web site [BigGilleysSmokhouseLLC.com](http://BigGilleysSmokhouseLLC.com).

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That's how you kind of take a small town and get it out there for people. And people will travel for barbeque.

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I know because I used to myself. I drove down to Austin, Little Rock, just all types of

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different places to eat barbeque because that's what I love. I enjoy it.

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[Murriel] And speaking of y'all's barbeque, you have one of the most unique menus I have ever seen.

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Loren, did you get a chance to see what's on that menu? I mean, [Loren] The Arkansas Twanky? What is that, Arkansas Twanky? 5:13

[Matt] The Arkansas Twanky. I had seen a rendition of it, one of my buddies came up with kind of what we've got going on. 5:18

But they just didn't have what we like to call the secret. 5:27

And that's that's really the only thing I can tell you all about it. 5:31

So it's a jalepeno pepper with all the seeds and the vein taken out. 5:34

We take 99% of the heat of it out, half of it stuffed with brisket. 5:39

The other half is stuffed with a cream cheese mixture. It's wrapped with a full piece of bacon. 5:44

And then we smoke it with a pecan wood. And then there's the secret. And that's it. 5:49

I can't divulge that. [Loren] So this is like a health food, right? [Matt] Yes, it is very much so. 5:53

I mean, you have all your food groups, meat, and your dairy. 5:57

[Loren] Well, I was raised you know, anything that makes you smile has got to be good for you. [Matt] That's it, once again, you know, the food brings people together. 6:01

[Murriel] And y'all have some other really unique menu items that I had never even heard of. 6:08

Y'all kind of tend to bring different things together for a unique menu item. 6:13

[Matt] That's that's what we try to do. I learned a long time ago that you need to really stay consistent.

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You know, we've only been open for a couple of years, but it's like my dad used tell me, you know,

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when he goes down the road to get a burger from the place, it's been open for 50 years.

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He wants it to taste the same way there when he was 16. So we're going to keep our brisket exactly the same thing all the way through.

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We're going to keep our meats the same. But we are always trying to stay on the cutting edge of something new, something innovative.

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I might say something on somebody else's post and just try to make that better.

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It's just always trying to bring the people what they want, the customers.

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That's really what the business is all about. As Mike ensure that everybody's happy and not hungry.

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That's one of our sayings right there, we guarantee that you'll never leave hungry or unhappy [Loren] Well, Matt,

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you mentioned social media, and what it has meant to your business.

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[Matt] Yes, sir. [Loren] It seems to me you're one of the businesses that has really embraced social media and the clientele it brings to you.

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[Matt] Yes. Absolutely. Social media has been a part of this ever since the beginning.

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But actually learning how to use it has been fundamental in this working. If you do the research on normal restaurants,

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about 90 percent of them don't make it through one year. That's a hard fact, but it's truth.

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And looking back for it, learning Facebook, when to post, when to do stuff like this, you know, the marketing side of it. It's also good to

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go door to door. Old school, eye to eye contact. But the Facebook, Instagram, all that, it puts them out to the masses.

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[Loren] So what works for you in that respect? When it comes to social media.

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[Matt] People get to know what our special is every day. It's another job.

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It literally is. And that's what people don't understand when they're getting into this.

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They don't realize that you run this barbeque shop. You smoked meat.

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And all this stuff you come up with is your social media platform is totally opposite of that job.

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So you have to hats. No matter what. All the time you really got three, four or five.

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But, you know, you have to post that at a certain time so people see it right before they go to work, you know, stuff like that.

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It's a learning experience. Facebook has been very essential to the growth of others.

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[Murriel] And I believe I saw that you guys have over 5000 Facebook followers. 8:36

Yet the city of Ashdown has a population you said of 4500. [Matt] Yes, ma'am. 8:40

That was a personal goal that I'd set out to get. 8:45

You know, when they like your page, it's hard for somebody if they're not your friend, to just go like it. Like this. 8:48

Like that. Me? I'm kind of reserved on all the likes, too, you know, I'll Like my buddy's stuff. 8:54

But if I'm like, who is Karen's Pampered Chef deal or something? 8:59

[Loren] Well, that would be me. {laughter} [Matt] But it's it's it's one of those things. 9:05

It was a personal goal for me. It took a little over two years answering Facebook, you know, back and forth, this and that. 9:10

You know, once we hit 5000, then I want 10. You just keep going. You have to. 9:17

It's part of the you know, entrepreneur spirit. It's just, you know, striving for the next thing. 9:22

[Murriel] OK, so let's say somebody likes your page and maybe they win a give away or they are following you on everything? 9:26

How do you guys keep people coming back once they've given Big Gilley's a shot? 9:33

[Matt] OK. We'll tell you this. Consistency. That's what it is. 9:39

They know they showed up there and they ate that brisket sandwich. 9:44

Well, then their family from Houston comes out and they go, "Hey. 9:48

I know this barbeque spot." You know, they bring all their family up there. 9:52

They know what they're getting and from right there and then they know everybody's gonna be happy. 9:55

They also know there's going to be some weird, funky dessert on there. That Fruity Pebbles cheesecake? 10:00

I'm a big boy. I will sit down and eat like four slices. So you know, you have your nostalgia and, you know, stuff like that. 10:05

But to me, it is consistency. It's knowing that. Oh Lord, 10:14

I'm hungry right now. You're going to get the juiciest brisket that you've ever had in your life. 10:18

It's going to be and I'll never toot my own horn, but the brisket and the pulled pork. 10:23

Oh, sweet Jesus. It's one of those things. [Murriel] OK. 10:29

We need to take a food tasting break. [Matt] Absolutely. 10:32

[Murriel] Can we do like a brisket sampling session right now? 10:37

You know, I should have. [Loren] Well Matt, what advice do you have for aspiring new business owners here in the rural Arkansas area? 10:43

[Matt] First of all, have a plan. When I started this, 10:51  
it was just a little twinkle, just a little thought right there in the back. 10:54  
Those are very scary times learning that you need to incorporate. 11:00  
You know, so none of your personal stuff. And then this and that. You can  
Google a lot of stuff. 11:04  
But what I would say, looking back through it, and I'm more than willing to  
help with this, 11:10  
too, because it doesn't really seem like a lot of people want to help you, 11:14  
you know, in this, because you're taking away their customers. You've got  
to stay the course. 11:19  
You know, I say make it one year and then make it five. You know, make it  
five. 11:25  
Make it twenty five. Might get 50. You just have to keep going. 11:29  
You have to keep pressing. If somebody needs to holler at me, give me a  
call. 11:33  
I would love to get them from point A to point B. 11:37  
I've done it numerous times. I have. I've helped people to get this done  
because there's not really any fighting. 11:41  
Like I said earlier, you can Google it, but, you know, you need to have you  
need to save this much up for this, this, this and this. 11:47

You know, I mean, unless you've got, you know, 30, 40, 50 thousand dollars just sitting around, it's one step at a time.

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That's how we did it. It's just one step at a time. [Murriel] It sounds like goal setting is a theme for Big Gilley's.

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You have your goal for social media followers. And you put giveaways and incentives out there until you get them.

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And then you guys have a goal for how long you got to be in business. Now you're working towards your five year.

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Yes ma'am. But what happens when something gets in the way of your goal?

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And you know where I'm going with this. [Matt] Oh, yeah. [Murriel] And none of us predicted this. And it came out of nowhere. And ruined everything.

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And it was Covid. Yeah. What did you guys do to respond?

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[Matt] Look how I got the crew together. And that's that's another thing. I have a really good set of people working for me.

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I do now. And I have in the past without those people. I wouldn't be here sitting in front of you today. When Covid popped up,

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I just, I had to get everybody together and I said, listen, it's meat and potatoes time.

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We need to sit down here and talk. I don't know what's going to go on. I said this way,

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we're going continue. Just like we have been. And I felt it was just gonna stop everything.

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Well, we sold out over and over. I had to do another smoke.

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People are you know, they're they're just so used to making this much potato salad, this much that,

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you know, an type of salads, hand done. Everything that we push out of there, it takes time.

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It's not something I just go through and get quick. And I mean, we're getting caught "hey

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we need more potato salad." Hey I'm having to run back and forth. You can't smoke a brisket in an hour.

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So we had to ramp up the meat and all that stuff.

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And we haven't stopped. It's been getting better and better ever since.

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And I know that's awkward, but we're set up for it. I like to call us a glorified food truck.

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You can either pull up right there. Get out. Get your food right through the window.

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You can sit outside, of course, they are six feet apart.

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You can call us and we'll bring it out to your vehicle. I mean, rain, sleet, sun, shine.

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It does not matter.

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We're going to do whatever we have to do to get it done to make sure you don't leave hungry or unhappy, regardless of any anything else that's going on.

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That's what we're going to. [Murriel] I wonder if that made the difference with Covid going on.

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You guys were still able to serve the community because you were already set up for the "to go" option.

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You know, the curbside pick up. You got your tables outside and you guys were basically already setup for a Covid-safe environment.

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[Matt] Yes. Absolutely. We haven't stopped. At first it was a little overwhelming because now we're doing a whole lot more business than we were before.

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I just looked at it kind of like its growth. Move from here to the next stage.

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Now we've attained that it is on to the next thing and hopefully all this Covid stuff,

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you know, hopefully it's over quicker than, you know. it's just hanging around.

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Lord knows that it's affected a lot of people and I've seen it take some businesses down through there.

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I mean, I'm more than willing to help any type, anybody who needs help with anything.

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We've just, we've always been that way. So what's good for us can be good for, you know, anybody helping them out business wise or you know anything.

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[Murriel] I think that comes back around to one of the things that comes along with being a rural business. You seem to be more community minded.

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Let's say, hypothetically, than a big city business would be. You're already thinking about your neighbors

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because you've grown up in a small local area and your small town community is business mind.

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[Matt] There is no two ways about it. I mean, if somebody comes up to your shop, Billy down the road, and your brisket is not spot on?

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Well, next thing you know, your uncle knows about it and then your dad quits, eating there.

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[Murriel] So your own family's gonna give up on because of what Joe said?

[Matt] I heard your brisket was cut wrong.

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I mean you can have a bad day and slice it just a little bit this way.

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And you know the next thing you know, it's like that. So we just do the best we can to do everything

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perfect. We've had mishaps, but we've learned from all of those and we've made it better every time.

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[Murriel] Anything else she would like the folks listening to know about the role business that is Big Gilley's Smokehouse.

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If you're wanting to try to start something like this, you have got to build some type of support system behind you.

16:03

We could not have done this without my mom.

16:11

First of all, you know with the desserts and sides and, you know, doing all that. People who work for you and just you,

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you have to get up every day and you have to be willing to work 24 hours a day.

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You're going to be tired. You're going to get two hours of sleep the first couple of months.

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And then you're gonna start learning how to delegate. And then you're going to always want to do it yourself because you did it yourself for so long.

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But just on the other side of it, come down and give us a try. I guarantee you won't leave hungry or unhappy.

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When I was walking him in her earlier,

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I got a phone call from the barbeque shop and some guys I know from Lockesburg went down there and they didn't know that we had onions in the Smoked Queso.

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You know, that's fine with me. Give him something on the house.

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That's part of the whole deal is just making sure that the customer is happy. Because some of these customers are your friends,

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someone are your family. Some of these people you don't even know. You come on down and

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give us a try. Probably won't go get barbecue nowhere else. [Loren] But you do that customer right that you didn't know when they came in,



17:09  
they may become your friend down the line, right? [Matt] Absolutely. You know we have had the same guy that comes up.

17:14  
I didn't know him from anybody. And he comes there literally every day we're open, you know, he's a pulled pork fan.

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And I mean, we see him all the time. You know, I've given you techniques on smoking meat, stuff like that.

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I mean, people really become your friends. And I guess it's food.

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It brings everybody together. It's been doing that since the beginning of time.

17:36  
[Murriel] And if you need any samplers, Loren and I would happily volunteer our time to come taste test everything.

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[Loren] Quality control is our middle name.

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[Matt] Absolutely. Ya'll have a meal on the house and we got you fixed up.

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[Murriel] So it has been an absolute pleasure. And I love sitting down with a local person and we're just excited to keep seeing Big Gilley's grow.

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And I love that you've given advice to the other business owners out there.

18:05  
[Matt] Yes ma'am, done the best we can. Thank you all very much for having us.

18:09  
It's been a pleasure. [Loren] Matt, thank you so much for being here today. Murriel,

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we're looking very much forward to our next episode of Arkansas Small Business, Big Rural Impact. 18:17

And today's episode, Barbeque and Branding - Marketing a Rural Restaurant. 18:23

I'm Loren Hinton and we thank you for joining us. We'll see you next time. 18:28

[Outro with music] For more information about this or any Create Bridges podcast or more about Create Bridges Arkansas, visit [uaex.edu/createbridges](http://uaex.edu/createbridges). 18:33

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