



Smokey Bones BBQ & Sports Bar Takes Home Five BBQ Trophies, Including First Place Ribs

Smokey Bones BBQ & Sports Bar Takes Home Five BBQ Trophies, Including First Place Ribs

ORLANDO, Fla., Nov. 10 -- Some of the best barbecue competitors in Florida showed up to listen to country artists Tanya Tucker and Loretta Lynn and participate in the 13th annual "Ham Jam Festival" in Middleburg, Fla., earlier this month. One of those top competitors was the Smokey Bones BBQ & Sports Bar team -- Orlando, Fla.-based Darden Restaurants' latest test restaurant -- who were the big winners with five trophies, including three first place awards. Their crowning moment was winning first place in "ribs" since ribs are a signature item at all three Smokey Bones locations. The team also placed first in "showmanship," third in "whole hog" and seventh in "pork shoulder."

For the Smokey Bones team of Executive Chef John Radcliff, Sous Chef Eric Ebersbach, Gina Radcliff, Preston Moore, Kathy Clark, Bob Clark and Brian Walker, it was their second "sanctioned" barbecue competition, following the "Big Bend Pig Fest and Feast" in Tallahassee, Fla., in September. At that event, the Smokey Bones team placed first in "hot chicken wings," second in "pork ribs" and fifth in "pork shoulder." Winners in these events, sanctioned by the granddaddy of all barbecue competitions, the "Memphis in May" World Championships, are serious barbecue contenders who get together to compare notes, test recipes, and show judges what they're made of. They go on to compete against 300 national-level teams in the biggest barbecue event of the year in Memphis, Tenn.

As Radcliff and his team gear up for the Memphis challenge, they hope to bring home a lot more trophies while checking out the competition. "We were up against some tough competitors at the Ham Jam Festival," he said, "but we know we make great-tasting barbecue, and we're looking forward to showcasing it at future competitions, especially the World Championships in May."

Smokey Bones BBQ & Sports Bar is Darden's newest internally developed concept, with two restaurants operating in Orlando and a third in Columbus, Ohio. The company said initial results are very encouraging and the sports bar/barbecue mix in a mountain lodge setting is proving to have broad appeal for sports fans, families and singles. Find out more on their website at www.smokeybones.com.

Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI) also owns and operates Red Lobster, Olive Garden, and Bahama Breeze restaurants, with sales of \$3.7 billion.