

Community Spotlight

BBQ

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Joe Evans never imagined a life as a restaurateur growing up. But, twenty plus years after he entered the hospitality field, here he is, a vital cog in the Log Cabin Smokehouse operation.

Evans has a bevy of experiences, somewhere near 20 years' worth, that he can count on as he moves his latest project forward.

"It started at Longhorn Smokehouse which then became Hickory River Smokehouse and I worked there for about 15 years. Then I worked at Buffalo Wild Wings before having an opportunity to open Smokey's House," Evans related.

Evans, whose early childhood was spent in Metcalf, migrated to Champaign in 1980, and never imagined himself making a career in the service industry, although his entire professional life has been

spent in restaurants.

"I worked in restaurants growing up, and I kind of stayed in the restaurant business. I worked at a couple of steakhouses and in the fast-food business. I worked at Mountain Jack's with a gentleman named Brad Bowman and then he opened up Longhorn Smokehouse, which eventually became Hickory River, and I worked for him for a long time, and that's how it all started," he shared.

After having sampled some of his wares, it's pretty obvious that he's found his niche' and he readily concurs.

"I think everyone has something that they're good at, and this is what I do. I've come to realize that this is who I am," he said with a laugh.

As with many ventures, the idea to get started again, after having previous ventures, came to him from his wife, Chao Yang, as he readily admitted.

"The wife and I were driv-

ing back and forth all the time between Charleston and Champaign after we closed our restaurant, and she saw it and she wanted a place that was a little bit closer to her family, we came in and she just fell in love with the people. All of the people really made it," Evans said.

As all Pit Masters are hesitant to do, Evans had difficulty selecting a favorite breed to put under smoke, though he eventually admitted that one stood out above the others.

"It's tough because you can't go wrong with a Brisket. It(his favorite) just varies all the time. Our smoked turkey is phenomenal. My favorite sandwich is a smoked turkey Reuben, for example.

Evans waxed eloquently when asked about his most challenging smokes.

"The brisket is the hardest, because no two cows are the same. Every Brisket you get in is a little different, so it's not like you can just put them all in there and they're

done at the same time, in and out and they're all done at the same time. I run my smoker with all wood, no gas, and it's hickory only, so knowing the pit is everything. The right temperature, the right smoke, the right flow. Sometimes you load all your meat at the same time, and it's not done at the same time, just like ribs. You just gotta know your pit. You could open up your smoker and if you don't know what you're doing it could be 50 degrees hotter than it was before. That fifty degrees hotter may not sound like much, but it might take 4 or 5 hours to get that temperature down," Evans enthused.

Another problem that faces the pit master is that all of the proteins he has in his smoker have different cook times.

"When I'm running my pit, I usually have 3 or 4 meats in there at all times. I'll have brisket in there, burnt ends in there, pork in there, maybe some pork chops so everything

is cooking on different cycles. Maybe you've got turkey in there and all of a sudden it shoots up to 350 and you don't want that," he noted.

If early returns are to be trusted, this venture seems to be succeeding.

"We opened for Bar Business around mid-July and we got the permit and opened for food around July 29. This is our third weekend with food, and everything has been going really well. Some nights we sell out, like today. We sold out of burnt ends. Everyone seems to like our food and our atmosphere. Everyday there's a new face," he noted.

Naturally, the opening wasn't without its own worries, as there was always the chance that unforeseen structural improvements could be needed, but so far that hasn't been the case, and as for Evans he remained philosophical throughout the transition.

"You go in and you have a plan and then everything gets

changed. You just don't know what you're getting into," he related with a laugh.

As for the future, Evans envisions some minor tweaks, but nothing major, and a big contributor to his line of reasoning is the reception the business has received.

"So far, the community has been treating us well, and that's what is important," Evans noted. "We're trying to keep our menu simple, we don't have 50 things on our menu, but we're going to add a couple of things, like hot dogs for kids, maybe Chicago Dogs, stuff like that. We'll have Nachos on the menu next week. We have ribs on Saturdays only."

As for the name of the establishment, Evans wanted to make it clear that the Smokey's name, at least as far as this location is concerned, is not an option.

"This is the Log Cabin," he stated emphatically. "You can't change that."

Coach

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accepted me immediately," said VonLanken. "I fit in with their coaching staff. I started to learn how to view the game as a coach, instead of a player. I want to give a bit of shoutout to Coach (Nick) Lindsey and the Arcola coaching staff for taking a chance on a young guy like me."

Arcola was 4-5 last year. As

an Arcola coach, his first game was against his former high school team.

"That was a strange experience," said VonLanken of the contest between the Warriors and the Purple Riders. "I just tried to brush it off and concentrate on coaching the team. I looked at the position last year as an intern. Eventually, I hope to be a head coach."

VonLanken is hoping to learn from Romine and the

other Tuscola coaches that helped mold the player he became. One year ago, the Warriors posted a record of 9-3 and advanced to the third round of the playoffs.

Before coaching at Arcola and becoming a car salesman at Ford of Tuscola, VonLanken was a college football player for the McKendree University Bearcats in Lebanon. He was with the Bearcats for three years. He is 1.5 years away

from earning his Bachelor's Degree. The Bearcats are a NCAA Division II team that competes in the Great Lakes Valley Conference.

At Tuscola, the tackle was part of what was arguably the finest offensive line in Warrior history. He was a tackle on the 2017 team, which finished second in the Illinois High School Association Class 1A State Championships. They would lose to the Lena-Win-

slow Panthers by one point.

He helped the Warrior's high-powered offense that year score a total of 583 points, an average of 41.6 points per game. They finished 13-1 overall, losing only the state title game at Northern Illinois University. They would score 50 or more points in five games in 2017.

Starting at the other tackle in the state title game was Hunter Woodard, who would

suit up for the Oklahoma State University Cowboys. CJ Picazo, a guard on that team, is currently a junior at Concordia University-St. Paul and playing NCAA Division II football.

"Coach Romine and I talk regularly," said VonLanken. "He offered me a position at Tuscola. I am looking forward to learning as much as I can from the group of coaches that helped me so much."

Tuscola Volleyball starts new year with a new look

By Lenny Sementi

Tuscola's 2023-24 version will have a slightly new look as they enter coach Emily Griswell's maiden voyage as the new bench boss. Griswell however is not new to the program

after being an assistant under long time coach Lydia Miller. The new leader got the nod late and utilized an abridged summer program and is making up for loss time in the preseason working technique and condi-

tioning around the construction at the high high school.

Griswell played for Abby McDonald at St. Joe Ogden and knows what it takes to build a successful program. "Taking over the head coaches position has its challenges, as any new position would," stated Griswell. "Yet, I'm thankful for the opportunity to lead this particular group of girls, with my assistants by my side. It's been a while since my playing days

but anyone who knows volleyball around the area knows how strong of a program Abby has built, she has had a big influence on me as a past player and new coach. The girls were all very excited and open to the change that was to occur. With the later hire, our summer was more laid back than it has been in previous years. I'm looking forward to the experiences that the team will have next summer."

Seven seniors return for their fourth go round in the black and gold. "Sydney Moss and Emily Czerwonka have been putting in extra effort the past week, and I'm looking forward to seeing them work together and the success they will have," stated the Warrior coach. Zoey Thomason will join Moss in the front row as a hitter as will Natalie Hastings and Catie Gibson.

The junior class sports five

athletes: Carly Ochs, Ayla Deleva, Olivia Wallace, Ava Rauguth, and Belle Notaro. Ochs will be big up front will Rauguth will help out in the backcourt. Nine Sophomores and thirteen freshman round out the squad giving some backbone to a strong senior class. "We have a large freshmen group this year," commented Griswell. "It's always exciting to get a big group in and shape them throughout their high school career."



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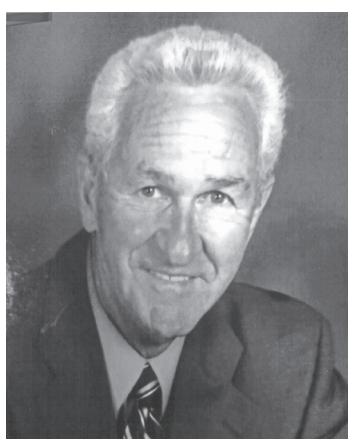
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Obituaries



Lyle Johns

Lyle Johns

Lyle W. Johns, 84, of Tuscola, passed away at 9:39 a.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 9, 2023, at Aspen Creek in Sullivan.

Visitation for Lyle was held from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Sunday, Aug. 13, 2023, at the Edwards Funeral Home, Arcola. Funeral services were held at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, Aug. 14, 2023, at the Edwards Funeral Home. Pastor Duane Piercy officiated. The burial was in the Tuscola Cemetery.

Lyle was born on Sept. 6, 1938, at Jarman Hospital in Tuscola to Raymond and Thriasia (Elam) Johns. He married Maryanne Duncan on July 31, 1965, at the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church near Bongard.

He is survived by his wife of 58 years, Maryanne Johns

terfield, Miss., and Mary (Jim) Baird of Arcola.

Lyle was preceded in death by his parents, and four siblings, Harold Johns, Lloyd Johns, Betty Guth and Barbara Gibson.

Lyle was a 1958 graduate of Arcola High School, where he lettered in sports. He also attended Eastern Illinois University and Decatur Barber College.

He began his farming career with his brother, Lloyd Johns and farmed for forty years.

Lyle was an avid hunter, fisherman, golfer, and airplane pilot. He was especially proud of the log cabin that he, his sons, many friends and "head contractor" Dale Bingham built in the woods. Lyle loved hunting mushrooms,

four wheeling on the trails and hosting "deer camp" in the fall for his hunting buddies.

Lyle and Maryanne enjoyed spending the winter months in Sebring, Fla. for several years.

Lyle loved his family, relatives and friends and enjoyed all the gatherings and celebrations that were shared.

He attended the Victory Church in Camargo.

The Johns family greatly appreciates the caring staff and residents at Aspen Creek for their love and support shown to Lyle, and to Traditions Hospice for their great guidance, emotional and spiritual support.

Memorials were made to the Arcola Foundation in Memory of Lyle Johns or to Traditions Hospice of Decatur.



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