

The food that binds: Barbecue brings people together during roundup at Cadence Bank Center in Belton

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BELTON — The Central Texas BBQ Roundup drew a very large crowd Saturday in and around the Equine/Livestock Complex of the Cadence Bank Center.

A total of 104 barbecue teams competed for part of the \$28,000 purse. People taking in the event could sample from some of these teams and even sit in as judges. Other attractions included face painting, a petting zoo, bounce house, car show and live music. Inside the complex, there were representatives of 32 animal rescuers and shelters.

George Bunker, president and CEO of CTBR, said he got the inspiration for the roundup in the middle of the night.

“I’m always one who tries to give back, and the division in our society is growing,” he said. “But there is more that binds us if we just get together without outside influence.”

Part of the draw Saturday was free food, he said. Volunteer judges could sample barbecue for free.

As one of the co-founders of CTBR, he said he and his associates built it in West Texas and South Texas.

“We’ve raised over \$5 million since 2020,” he said. “All of that goes back to charities. We are 100 percent nonprofit — no salaries. Even the two cranes (holding two giant U.S. flags) were donated. We plan for it to become the biggest barbecue competition in the world, with a goal of 600 teams.”

One of the barbecuers, John Clepper of McGregor, calling his grill “Rolling With Cole,” has been barbecuing for about 12 years.

“I usually stay around here within a 300-mile range,” he said. He was barbecuing chicken and already had handed it in for judging.

“People come up for free samples of chicken until we run out,” he said.

His buddy, William Abshire of Austin, said he prepared dirty rice with crayfish etouffe.

“They liked it,” he said. “I hope the judges do, too.”

Matt Kaspar of Salado said he’s been barbecuing for about 5 years but has been on his own with Bapsak BBQ for 3 years.

He was invited to the national finals in Kansas City, Mo., last year, but didn’t go.

“I cook almost every weekend,” he said. “I think I cooked 35 weekends last year.”

He tries to make enough prize money to pay for the next competition, he said. He was hoping his brisket would place this time.

Jamie Beran of Thorndale and his son, Bryson, 21, were competing separately this weekend, the dad as Post Oak Cookers and the son as Shift Work. They have been barbecuing for two years and try to do two or three contests a month.

“Sometimes he’ll help me,” Jamie Beran said. “Sometimes he cooks against me. It’s just a good hobby we love to do. We spend time with friends and family, mingle with all of our friends.”

Jamie Beran was in the national finals in Kansas City, Mo., in Nov. 2025.

“My best meat was 40th place out of 400 teams, in the pork division,” he said.

Inside the complex, Bunker’s wife, Tracie, said there were 32 animal rescuers and shelters represented.

“We’ve already had three adoptions this morning,” she said. “We also have a free Belton Vet Clinic, with free vaccines for dogs and cats.”

Implants of free microchip identification also was available, she said.

“They’ve been very busy,” she said. “We also have Mobi Dog Salon. They are doing free nail trims and free ear cleaning.”

They also had small “fun animals,” she said. That included “gliders,” ferrets, a kangaroo, turtles, and lots of dogs.

