

10-16-2013

NNB News : 2013 : 10 : 16 : There's Something in the Air...

Andrew Kramer

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nnb_news

Scholar Commons Citation

Kramer, Andrew, "NNB News : 2013 : 10 : 16 : There's Something in the Air..." (2013). *NNB News*. 39.
https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/nnb_news/39

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Neighborhood News Bureau (USF St. Petersburg campus) at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in NNB News by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usf.edu.



MIDTOWN

ST. PETERSBURG

TAMPA BAY

PEOPLE

 October 16, 2013  [Midtown](#)  [No comments](#)

THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE AIR...

BY ANDREW KRAMER

NNB Student Reporter

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — One by one, the cars line up in the drive thru to fulfill their occupants' cravings for gyros, when suddenly, it hits them – the sweetest scent imaginable – the smoke pouring out of the barbeque joint next door.

"People go to Salem's and smell the smoke," says Melvin Hall, owner of Connie's BBQ in Midtown.

Shortly after smelling the smoke, they find themselves inside of a quaint little space filled with wood paneling and icons from yesteryear. Ms. Pacman sits patiently along the right wall awaiting quarters – a Coca-Cola machine keeps her company, and four gumball machines serve as her competition; on the left wall – a Creative Loafing Tampa Bay award for the best sweet potato pie of 2006.

Where the wood paneling shies away, a beige concrete wall takes its place. Ironically, as nice as the beige looks, the wall is actually white. Hall says the smoke from the barbeque pits causes the walls to darken over time, which requires them to be repainted every few years.

Hall, 65, has been working with the same smoky ingredient since Connie's opened in 1986. His mother, Connie, ran things back then. Eventually, Hall, who drove trucks at the time, took the reigns of the family business. Needless to say, beyond the name, there are still various reminders of the way things were in the past – namely, the "Super Connie Burger," which resides as the lone hamburger on the menu.

However, Connie's is primarily known for its ribs, chicken, and sweet potato pie, which, like mostly everything within Connie's, has not had single ingredient changed since the beginning and are still made from scratch by hand each day – Hall wouldn't want it any other way.

Hall said the key to being successful in barbeque is to stick with one type of sauce, one method of cooking, and that practice makes perfect. With the only change to the menu being an addition of a few more items, his strategy has proved successful through the years, and competition does not concern him at all.

Surprisingly, Hall routinely visits other barbeque restaurants in the area, where sometimes his customers see him and ask why he would stray from his own delicious offerings.

Even if he is somewhat supporting his potential competition, customers (even the competition) flock into Connie's daily – which never fails to put a smile on his face.

Hall says his favorite part of each day is, "When new customers rush back and say, 'that was so good!'"

Connie's co-pitmaster, Geno Harold, agrees wholeheartedly. Harold, 58, has worked at Connie's for about 20 years and says his job is to do everything.

It is clear to customers new and old that both men work together in perfect harmony, similar to the



Andrew Kramer | NNB
Geno Harold tends to the pit while Melvin Hall stands ready for the next customer.

RECENT POSTS

Their Midtown vintage market draws thousands of customers

To these upbeat volunteers, every animal is a priority

Her job: make white people aware of blacks' struggles

His work graces public places and private homes around the country

At the age of 6, she knew what she wanted to be

They shared a childhood of tense times, warm memories

He rocks 'n' rolls in a music buff's dream job

Photojournalist finds her bliss behind the camera

Unsavory people and heinous crimes? That's his beat

By being honest about who he is, he makes a difference

13 Years later, she's back as a teacher and role model

A Sunday tradition: faith and fancy hats

For Times photojournalist, life's a day at the beach

Pop open a cold one at Midtown's 3 Daughters Brewing

Polish distillery brings distinctive spirits to Midtown

On patrol, the routine can suddenly turn serious

At alternative weekly, food and drink are her beats

Passionate piano, colorful footwear help him coach journalists

Mining disaster helped steel him for a new career in public relations

As college building goes up, he's a maestro in Midtown

School strives to break the cycle of generational poverty

He finds the facts, the people and the payments that elude others

He lives his son's dream, every step of the way

Lorene's is still thriving after two decades in The Deuces

Inside a struggling middle school, the student newspaper is thriving

ingredients and recipes they cling to so dearly. Some customers drive from as far as Brandon and Cocoa Beach, Fla. nearly every week, while others have been coming back regularly since 1986. Hall says he has seen countless customers grow up through the years as they stopped by each day.

Barbeque was not always such an easy business for Hall and Harold. For years they needed to wake up around 3-4 a.m. to tend to the barbeque pits. But recently they discovered they can sleep in much later due to one method of their entire process changing – a method that they cannot even control: hog farmers cut the fattening time in half from roughly eight months to four, which allows the meat to be more tender and require less cooking time – just another reason for that smile on Hall's and Harold's faces.

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Name *

Email *

Website

Comment

DEPARTMENT OF
JOURNALISM
AND MEDIA STUDIES

