

A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS: RCC'S 2025 BATTLE OF THE BUTT WINNERS, BRANT RIVENBARK AND ETHANY HAMMONDS

The 5th Annual Battle of the Butts Fundraiser for Robeson County's Communities in Schools is now in the history books. Since 2021, Robeson Community College Culinary Arts students have been battling it to create the best barbeque sauce, and the best barbeque rub for the now famous Battle of the Butts fundraiser.

This year, more than 900 plates were sold, raising over \$10,000 for Communities in Schools.

Culinary Arts students Brant Rivenbark (best rub) and Ethany Hammonds (best sauce) won the contest and had their signature original recipes featured during the barbeque plate sale.

"It was crazy," Hammonds said of the plate sale. "It just started as a sauce and now 1000 people have had a chance to try it out... we are definitely thankful for the opportunity and the experience."

"Thank y'all for coming out," stated Rivenbark to those in the community. "I hope everyone enjoyed it, it means a lot that you purchased a plate, thank you for trying out the barbeque, and thank you for supporting us."

Story behind Ethany Hammonds Secret Sauce

Ethany Hammonds says she is a "baking and pastry arts student all the way."

At the age of 19, she became the first student from the RCC Early College to win the Battle of the Butts contest, an honor that just a few have enjoyed.

Hammonds says her specialty lies in cakes, pastries, and baking macaroons, so to win such a revered culinary competition in Robeson County for a sauce, she says was quite remarkable.

"It was surreal, I didn't quite expect it," Hammonds stated. "Chef Jordan, she pushed me... the principal for the Early College said I made him proud... I didn't think I would win, it wasn't what I expected when I made the sauce."

"I came up with the recipe last year, and I wanted to make it versatile and try different things to pair the sauce with," Hammonds said. "I have always been a picky eater, and I've never had a 'go to' sauce before and wanted one, so I made up my own."

"The sauce was a personal thing that I never expected to share, but I was heavily encouraged by the instructor," Hammonds stated. "It's a ketchup-based barbeque sauce with molasses and a hint of spice. It's a sweeter, tangy kind of sauce. The spice in the back helps to push the sweetness forward."

When her instructor said, "I would lick this off a shoe," it eased all her anxieties.

"You could put it on a burger, on chicken, anything," she said. "I want more of it, that's what they told me."

Ethany says that although her sauce was a winning success, she sees her future being filled with cake pops, brownies, and anything that is baked.

"I have always wanted to open my own bakery," Hammonds said. "I'm going to shoot for the stars, I already have loyal customers who order cakes that I bake personally... I want to hear people say, 'Ethany's is the place I want to go to,' that's how I want people to feel about me."

Starting at a young age, Ethany often baked with her grandmother, who made her a special apron.

"I made my first cake at 8," Hammonds stated. "When I saw that the Baking and Pastry program was available through the Early College, I knew that was what I wanted to do.... Baking and Pastry was my focus, it's not a job but a career, a hobby that you get to do in life... it's what I love most."

She adds, "Baking is patience, preciseness, dedication, you have to really love what you are doing."

The next steps for Ethany, she says, is getting more business knowledge so she can successfully start her own business.

"I want to learn the legal side, so I can know what I need to do," she said. "And, marketing, like target marketing, target audience, cost control, that kind of thing."

As for her experience at Robeson Community College, Hammonds had this to say.

"The Early College and RCC has done a lot for me," she stated. "I'm thankful for the baking and pastry arts program, a lot of people underestimated me and looked at me as a child, but I've met some amazing people and made many connections... all three of my instructors have been the greatest."

Story behind Brant Rivenbark's Secret Rub

Brant Rivenbark's discovery of culinary arts he says is "something new, found a love for it and just kept pursuing... I helped out in the kitchen a lot when I was younger, so I guess it was meant to be."

Rivenbark says winning the contest for best rub, was a significant milestone that he does not take for granted.

"It felt rewarding, and I felt accomplished," Rivenbark stated. "I was so proud of myself, I won something that meant something, it was very rewarding, and it felt good knowing that 900 people got to try my rub and enjoy it."

"It showed me that I could get involved with the program and improve myself," Rivenbark said.

Brant's rub had a distinctive flavor, capturing the taste buds of judges.

"It was made up of brown sugar, paprika, onion, garlic, ground mustard, salt and pepper," Rivenbark reveals.

"My rub had more of a sweet and smoky flavor that was tangy," Rivenbark told. "My rub was sweet and Ethany's sauce was tangy, so it went well together."

As he and the rest of his culinary class prepared the plates for the Battle of the Butts, Rivenbark says, it was the experience of a lifetime.

"It felt thrilling, exciting, locked in the moment," he said. "It really gave you a full, realistic experience of what it is like to work in a rushed environment, like in a restaurant, it was chaotic, but it was great."

And that's one thing he loves about the culinary arts program at Robeson Community College, the opportunity to get better and develop more skills through hands-on training and real-world experiences.

"We get to learn about what we are going to be doing, and then we go do it in the lab and practice," Rivenbark said. "I'm not too much into baking, I love to cook steaks, chicken, grilled chicken, fish, jambalaya, that type of thing."

"I want to own my own restaurant one day," Brant says. "I want to own and operate a Michelin Star Award Restaurant, which is an exclusive restaurant, but only if it's top-notch... and that's where I want to be with my skill level."

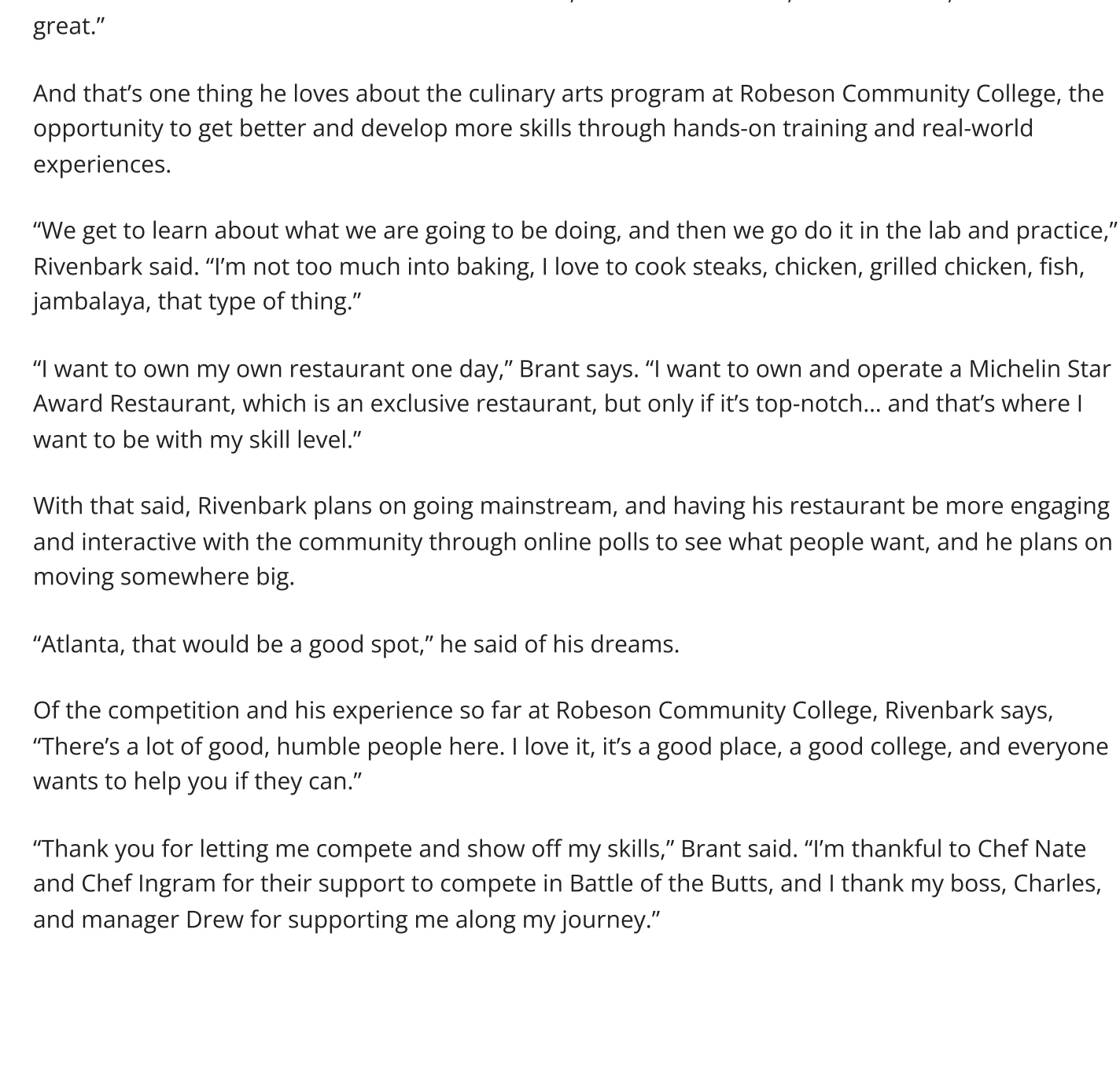
With that said, Rivenbark plans on going mainstream, and having his restaurant be more engaging and interactive with the community through online polls to see what people want, and he plans on moving somewhere big.

"Atlanta, that would be a good spot," he said of his dreams.

Of the competition and his experience so far at Robeson Community College, Rivenbark says, "There's a lot of good, humble people here. I love it, it's a good place, a good college, and everyone wants to help you if they can."

"Thank you for letting me compete and show off my skills," Brant said. "I'm thankful to Chef Nate and Chef Ingram for their support to compete in Battle of the Butts, and I thank my boss, Charles, and manager Drew for supporting me along my journey."

Check out photos from the Battle of the Butts fundraiser below. Plates included barbecue, baked beans, bread, and brownies for dessert.



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