

# CHAMPIONSHIP RIBS: ARCHIBALD'S BRINGS HOME ANOTHER TITLE // USA TODAY RANKS IT 6<sup>TH</sup> IN THE U.S.



WHAT IS IN A NAME? Tales of times past, exploits and memories of things one may never truly know. Names are more than mere tags one adorns from first breath to last light; they are what gives credence to future actions through association with past standards, a guiding light best utilized while traversing life's most ancient roads. Tuscaloosa is home to myriad surnames that reflect the aforementioned truth, the Bryants, Wales and Sabans of the world, with all leaving indelible marks on American, as well as local, history. Unbeknownst to most, another name deserves a place among the pantheon of great Tuscaloosans: Archibald's.

For well more than fifty years Archibald's has been the premier name in barbeque in West Alabama. The dream of George and Betty Archibald as a dining mainstay has seen ten different Presidents, 17 team sport national championships at The University of Alabama, and countless metamorphoses in national sociocultural dialogue, remaining a pillar of Tuscaloosa's community throughout it all. Values and community-based ideals the Archibald family held in high esteem remain key in sustaining the restaurant's grip on success within Tuscaloosa, a fact made all the more impressive when the amount of quality local competition is taken into account, while expanding their public presence abroad through sheer force and savvy. The eyes of the world are trained on the unassuming little shack in Northport, Alabama, and for good reason; simply stated, they are they best, recently adding another accolade to their storied history.

Archibald's, located on Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd. in Northport, has earned a place among the best barbeque restaurants in America, as deemed by one of America's most ubiquitous publications, USA Today, "the nation's newspa-

per." Composed of 20 restaurants from around the nation, Tuscaloosa's favorite rib place came in sixth on the list, earning the distinction of being Alabama's only rib restaurant and the Southeast's highest rated place to find excellent BBQ. "I love the pork ribs at Archibald's", said national food critic, John T. Edge, speaking of the iconic rib place. "They have a char, come slathered in orange-hued vinegary sauce, and require as all great pork ribs do, a tug of the incisors to loosen meat from the bone." Thoughts of a food critic perhaps, but such acclaim does not always translate into solidifying a customer base. Fortunately for Archibald's, that is not an issue. "I've been coming to Archibald's since way before he [George Sr.] died," proclaimed Ms. Betty Sullivan, a 30-year fan of the family-owned restaurant. "I was working on the west side and I would get over here, get me a plate, and go on back to the house. They got the best barbeque, and sauce too!" Who knew slow-smoked ribs smoked low over hickory wood would, or could for that matter, bring the world to such a humble abode. Surely the Archibald's did, but so did another man, James Little.

"What makes Archibald's so special is the family atmosphere as well as they way we cook the ribs. We cook them in a brick type of oven. Most people cook ribs outside but we cook them inside and we use either hickory wood or pecan wood," said Little, known around the company as "Big Joc". A man of giant stature and jovial spirit, he might be the rib shop's most vocal supporter, he was not shy in expressing how Archibald's got to the top and of what separates it from all competition, a crosstown rival that is arguably equally as lauded. "What Dreamland does is bring their sauce from Atlanta, Georgia; our sauce is made locally. Also, Dreamland has several owners while we are still

family-owned."

The South is well represented on USA Today's "America's Tastiest Ribs" list, representing locales from Driftwood, Texas to Washington D.C., filling twelve places on the list. Several peculiar locations also made the list, including Chicago's Twin Anchors, Compton's Bludso's, and New York City's Hill Country. Texas had the most restaurants to list, accounting for six spots.

As for the Yellow Hammer State, Archibald's wears the proverbial title and enjoys all rights and responsibilities associated with being the best BBQ joint in this great state. Still they refuse to rest on their laurels, vowing to continue operating under the standard of excellence that has gotten it this far and while working to become the best barbeque restaurant, period.

"Nothing that we do is gonna change. We are gonna continue to cook the meat the same, we are gonna continue to have a family atmosphere, and we are gonna continue to stay right here in the little white building on the hill cooking that good, good barbeque, tender Archibald's Ribs." You read correctly, the winners of Southern Living Magazine's "Taste of the Town" for Alabama, New York Times honorable mention, and #2 rated rib place by Good Morning America, is working harder to become better than they already are. The notion should instill fear in any and all competition but to Big Joc and the gorgeous Miss Kierra Archibald, heiress to the Archibald's and Woodrow empire, such an attitude is the only way things have and can ever be done. "To us, being number six is unbelievable," said Joc. "To us, right now, we're number one. That was a vote situation [with the USA Today], not a meat-tasting situation, because

we know for a fact that our meat and our sauce are number one. As far as a taste test, each one of the critics needs to come taste our ribs, then go to the other establishments and taste their ribs, and I guarantee you we will be number one."

The "Nature Boy" Ric Flair popularized the phrase, "to be the man, you have to beat the man." Archibald's and Woodrow has thrown down the proverbial gauntlet to all local, regional, and national barbeque restaurants since 1961. Go for the hot wings, catfish, and a big slice of southern hospitality, but dare not be labeled a rib aficionado without tasting slow cooked hickory or pecan wood-tinged char glory that is their signature dish. "The man" in this neck of the woods walks softly but carries a big stick. With the vision, passion, and desire displayed day in and day out at the little white shack across from a miniscule lumber yard, nestled comfortably on a hill on a picturesque old-timey Northport side street, one can believe it is safe to say that they will be bashing taste buds and winning over hearts for several more generations. Things will be then as they are right now; love and admiration will be gained the hard way, one rib at a time. They will have it no other way.

