

Meet the mentors who are

CELEBRATING THE CULTURE OF BLACK BBQ

and fueling its future.



KEVIN BLUDSO • BLUDSO'S BBQ • LOS ANGELES, CA

Kevin Bludso is a chef, television personality and two-time Steve Harvey Hoodie Award Winner. In 2008, he opened Bludso's BBQ, his small takeout BBQ stand in Compton, California. It has since grown into an international empire, with a flagship restaurant, Bludso's Bar & Que, in Hollywood, a concession stand at the LAFC Soccer Stadium, a location in Proud Bird by LAX, and a sprawling restaurant and bar called San Antone by Bludso's BBQ in the Crown Casino in Melbourne, Australia.

He is the judge on the hit Netflix BBQ competition show The American BBQ Showdown, and has multiple television appearances on shows like Diners, Drive-Ins and Drives and Bong Appetit, and as a recurring guest judge on Bar Rescue. His first cookbook, The Bludso Family Cookbook: BBQ Soul Food and Family, From Compton to Corsicana, is coming out in Spring 2022 for Ten Speed Press. Kevin currently resides in Corsicana, Texas, regularly traveling both nationally and internationally for his pop-up events and television appearances.



HOWARD CONYERS • NEW ORLEANS, LA

Dr. Howard Conyers is a pitmaster and educator on the history of Southern barbecue, as well as a rocket scientist. He hosts whole hog barbecue events, like Gumbo Jubilee, to speak about racism and social justice through food, agriculture, history, and capitalism. His work has been featured in various news outlets and he currently has books underway that focus on the significant role of African Americans in barbecue. Originally from Manning, South Carolina, Howard attended North Carolina A&T State University, a historically Black college and university (HBCU), to study Bioenvironmental Engineering. He later earned his MS and PhD in Mechanical Engineering from Duke University with a specialty in Aeroelasticity in 2009.



DEVITA DAVISON • FOODLAB • DETROIT, MI

FoodLab is a nonprofit organization that fosters the creation of an equitable local food economy by providing food entrepreneurs with education, peer-to-peer mentoring, and access to market opportunities. In the position of Executive Director since 2014, Devita works to build an ecosystem that provides these food entrepreneurs with the resources they need to scale good food businesses that create good jobs and catalyze positive change in their communities.

Her overall goal is to create a food economy that acknowledges the importance of food justice, community health, local ownership, and sustainability. She honed the theory and practice of Equitable Food Oriented Development that is at the core of FoodLab's work. She has applied this method to launch transformative initiatives such as FoodLab's Fellowship for Change in Food & Labor and "On The Table", a monthly forum designed to foster a dialogue on how to improve the restaurant industry. It has sparked a radical systemic transformation in thinking about the value of labor in the local food industry.

Devita Davison was a 2017 TED speaker and her TED Talk on the big stage has been seen over 1 Million times. She is a 2017 Grist Top 50 Leader in sustainability, a 2018 Southern Foodway Alliance Smith Fellow, and a 2019 Sustainability Champion. She is a graduate of Michigan State University where she received a B.S. in Social Science.



BRYAN FURMAN • BRYAN FURMAN BBQ • ATLANTA, GA

Bryan Furman's story is unique in that he left his day job as a welder to pursue cooking his signature-style pit smoked barbecue, chicken, brisket and ribs. What began as an idea to celebrate his daughter's first birthday in 2010 by roasting a whole hog for family and friends turned into catering and filling order requests from his co-workers.

As Furman's barbecue business continued to flourish, the past couple of years have been bittersweet for Furman, being named one of Food & Wine Magazine's 2019 Best New Chefs (the first Pitmaster to ever receive the title), also receiving a 2019 and 2020 James Beard Foundation semifinalist nomination for Best Chef Southeast. Unfortunately, Furman was without a restaurant in which to showcase his Pitmaster skills when the renowned B's Cracklin' Barbecue restaurant in Atlanta, Georgia succumbed to a tragic fire in March 2019.

Looking forward to opening another Atlanta location in the near future which will be branded as Bryan Furman BBQ, Furman is excited about what the future holds. In addition, Furman will be opening a second Atlanta location in the State Farm Arena, home to the Atlanta Hawks. In the meantime, he will be continuing collaborative Pop-Up cook-outs with friends throughout the southeast until the new location opens (projected late 2021/early 2022).

Bryan Furman is well known for his award-winning standards in all categories of barbecue and because of Furman's insistence on using Heritage hogs, along with his careful selection of woods for smoking and making his own side dishes using locally sourced, fresh Georgia Grown produce with a blend of unique ingredients.

Furman was recently featured on CBS Saturday Morning's The Dish and named Atlanta's BBQ King. Southern Living magazine selected his barbecue restaurant as one of "The South's Top 50 Barbecue Joints 2018" and the New York Times recently mentioned that his restaurant is the only barbecue restaurant in Atlanta turning out whole-hog barbecue with heirloom-breed hogs.



RASHAD JONES • BIG LEE'S FOOD TRUCK • OCALA, FL

Big Lee's food truck began as a hobby for TV star and celebrated pitmaster Rashad Jones after he was inspired by his wife's uncle, Leon Archie — nicknamed "Big Lee" — and his special blend of barbecue and hospitality at Thanksgiving dinner 2011 at his wife's family home in Greenwood, Mississippi. Leon was a source of knowledge, and when he passed in 2012, Rashad and his wife, Patrice, decided to self-educate on the business of barbecue.

In 2013, Rashad Jones entered the local Bad to the Bone competition, where his food took first place, giving him the boost he needed to establish Big Lee's as a legitimate barbecue business. A loyal fan base soon developed and in a short span of time, Big Lee's became a local and national name. Just two years after opening Big Lee's BBQ food truck in Ocala, Florida, Rashad attracted the attention of Food Network star Guy Fieri's show, Guy's Big Project. After winning the competition, the self-proclaimed barbecue nerd landed his own show, Eat, Sleep, BBQ where he traveled the country in search of down-home authentic meats and unexpected ways of using them.



AMY MILLS • 17TH STREET BBQ • MARION, IL

Amy Mills was raised up on smoke, sauce, and Magic Dust®. Heiress to the 17th Street Barbecue empire, she's the industry's go-to girl for all things barbecue. Recipient of the coveted Barbecue Heroine prize, she leads 17th Street alongside her dad, Mike Mills. She also runs OnCue Consulting, the only barbecue business consultancy in the world, offering seminars and training in the culinary techniques behind great barbecue. She's a featured judge on various barbecue shows such as Food Network's BBQ Brawl, CHOPPED, Food Network Canada's Firemasters, Best in Smoke, Kingsford Invitational, and Smoked, as well as co-star of the Mills family's own digital series, Peace, Love, and Barbecue, which debuted on YouTube in 2016.

Peace, Love, and Barbecue, co-authored with her dad, is considered a classic in the genre, was nominated for a James Beard Foundation award, and awarded the National Barbecue Association Award of Excellence. Their second book, Praise the Lard, was published in May 2017.

17th Street Barbecue is located in Southern Illinois, Murphysboro, named "Barbecue Capital of Illinois" by the State Legislature.