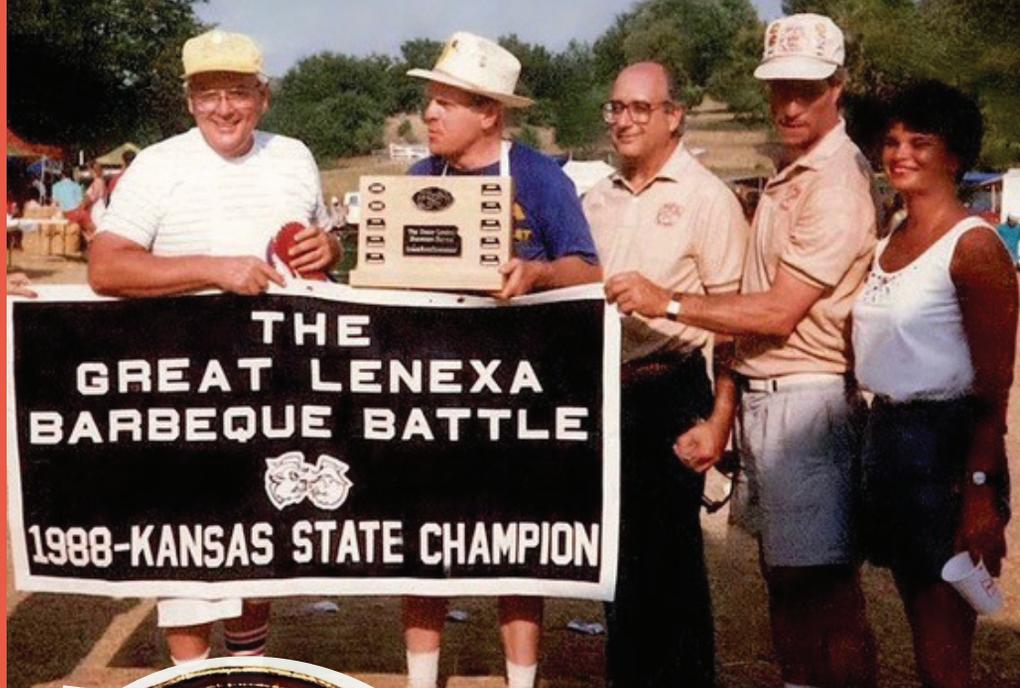


# A HISTORY OF OUR GREAT BBQ BATTLES

*A special report from the Lenexa Historical Society*

*Pictured at right: Alan Uhl, Mayor Rich Becker, Pat Dalton, David Stephens, Karen Willaur*



Forty years ago, the first Great Lenexa BBQ Battle was held on Saturday, July 3, 1982, as part of Lenexa's July 4th Community Days celebration. The idea came from Lenexans Alan Uhl and Pat Dalton.

Here's how the December 21, 1981, Lenexa Parks and Recreation Advisory Board minutes recorded the birth of Lenexa BBQ:

### ***"Item No. 3 - Bar-B-Q Cook Off***

*"Alan Uhl gave a brief slide presentation of the cook off at the American Royal. He asked that Lenexa have a cook off on Saturday afternoon during Community Days weekend. He explained that he and Pat Dalton were just in the early planning stages of the event. They felt that Indian Trails Park would be a good place to have the cook off. Fees and rules will have to be decided on. The Board felt it was a good idea and will incorporate it into Community Days."*



Twelve teams competed in that first contest on the southwest corner of 87th Street Parkway and Greenway Lane. Twelve judges tasted samples of beef, pork, lamb, ribs, poultry, sausage, whole animal and miscellaneous. They declared Paul Kirk the winner. The prize was a case of Michelob beer, and when it was awarded to Chef Kirk, a bottle was missing.

From those small embers grew the blaze that has become, as proclaimed by Governor John Carlin in 1984, "THE OFFICIAL ANNUAL BARBEQUE CONTEST OF THE STATE OF KANSAS, AND ITS GRAND CHAMPION TO BE THE KANSAS STATE CHAMPION BARBEQUE CHEF." (This was the first state barbecue championship ever declared by any state.)

The contest has annually grown to nearly 200 teams, a like number of judges, scores of trophies, ribbons and plaques, along with tens of thousands of dollars in prize money. It has afforded numerous Lenexa community-building volunteer hours and fundraising opportunities, with thousands of people visiting the contest to pick up smoking tips and reconnect with neighbors and friends. It causes "return to Lenexa" vacations to be planned around the event held the fourth Saturday in June, and carries on in all kinds of weather, from scorching June heat through the horrendous rains of 1991 and 2019.

Over the decades, the contest improved innovatively: Ambassadors who cater to the teams, table captains who cater to the judges, computerized

scoring, Kansas City Barbecue Society sanctioning, Spirit Awards, Founders' Trophies, shade and electric fans under a tent with bottled water for judges (rather than the early days of tables arranged in an open sun-drenched field and a garden hose).

In April, wanting to reserve a spot in the contest, teams have been known to line up the night before for an 8 a.m. registration. Contest winners have gone on to open successful restaurants and catering businesses. The contest has bolstered local Lenexa pride and added weight to Kansas City's claim to being "The BBQ Capital of the World." In the 2001 book, "The Grand Barbecue," it was described as one of the top four contests in the world. It was even the filming site of a Kingsford Charcoal commercial.

Yes, the 1981 Lenexa Parks and Recreation Advisory Board thought a Bar-B-Q Cook Off would be "a good idea." Forty years later, it still is.

