



EMILY BROWN

Brown begins work as Galax tourism director

The former teacher also has experience in event planning

By SHANNON WATKINS
 Staff

Emily Brown, formerly a science teacher at Galax High School, has been named Galax's new tourism director.

Though she doesn't come from a tourism background, Brown brings a lot of experience in organizing large public events and a love of the city to the job, the Galax native says.

Brown will take over when current director Ray Kohl steps down on Sept. 30, after her training is complete. She says he's showing her both the big things and little ones, like "how to run the office, kind of taking it a little bit slow so that eventually, when it's time for me to take over in September, I'll be ready."

She studied at Wytheville Community College and transferred to Radford University, where she graduated in 2009 with a bachelor's degree in biology and an associate degree in education.

Brown taught high school biology, ecology, physical science and AP biology over a 10-year scholastic career. Along with that, she notes, there was also a lot of fundraising and coordinating with other schools for training and teaching, so reaching to outside agencies and working with both agencies and large groups of people isn't new to her.

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Thunderstruck

"Strikes" are usually found in bowling, not golf, but a thunderstorm recently left a hole that turned into a water hazard on a Galax golf course. Employees at Blue Ridge Country Club found a real mess when they arrived for work the morning after a recent storm. An irrigation sprinkler head was struck by lightning on the fourth hole, creating a large crater in the ground and large amount of mud. The storm dumped two inches of rain on the city.

Gazette photo by Larry Chambers

Search for missing man ends with murder charge

Remains found in Lowgap, N.C., believed to be those of man missing nearly a year

Staff Report

LOWGAP, N.C. — Police in Surry County have charged a man with murder in connection with human remains found Saturday in Lowgap.

They believe the body is a Surry man who has been missing for close to a year.

The Lowgap community is just

south of Galax, Va., on Route 89.

In a statement issued this weekend, Surry County Sheriff Steve Hiatt said his office worked with the Mount Airy Police Department and the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation to search a property at 321 Bowtie Lane in Lowgap on July 20.

The remains are believed to be Michael Dean Martin, who was

last seen in August 2018.

The sheriff's office arrested Javier Gonzalez Garcia, 47, and charged him with murder. He is being held without bond in the Surry County Detention Center.

The sheriff did not say why police searched the property or why they believe they found



GARCIA

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PUTTING ON A WINGDING

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH BBQ TEAMS COMPETING IN SMOKE ON THE MOUNTAIN'S "NO PRO WING SHOW"

By SHANNON WATKINS
 Staff

"You would be amazed how hard it is to glitter a chicken," says Lori Baumgardner at the No Pro Wing Show tent. She's indicating one of the awards for the amateur wing contest at this year's Smoke on the Mountain, a shiny gold plastic chain with a spangly silver poultry silhouette dangling from it, called "the golden chain of the wing."

It's draped over an equally shiny gold trophy cup. They used a smaller version of the wooden plaques used to award wing contest winners, covering it in glue and shellac and liberally applying glitter.

This marks the first year for the No Pro Wing Show, which event sponsor the Twin County Chamber of Commerce hopes will be popular enough to warrant it becoming a regular event. With 14 teams signed up for 2019, it looks like interest is already high.

Unlike the other ceremonies for this past weekend's Smoke on the Mountain, the official Virginia State Barbecue Championship, both the cooking and the award ceremony take place on Friday. The Memphis Barbecue Network (MBN)-sanctioned, all-pork competition's cooking started Friday and continued until Saturday, because it takes a long time to smoke a pig.



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Grand champions The Barbecueuties, comprised of women from Ranucci's Big Butt BBQ, a professional team out of Charlotte, N.C. They include Zoe, Cathy, Mila and Giada, all with the same last name, Ranucci.

Gazette photos by Shannon Watkins



Teams prepare their wing entries (above), while judges sample the finished product (left).

WEATHER

MONDAY
 PARTLY SUNNY,
 SHOWERS AND STORMS
 HIGH 77°F • Low 64°F
 PRECIP: 80%

TUESDAY
 MORNING STORMS,
 SHOWERS LATER IN DAY
 HIGH 67°F • Low 56°F
 PRECIP: 80%

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Wings

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Getting Ready

It's Friday afternoon just before 2 p.m., when the teams will pick up their wings and the styrofoam turn-in boxes for their entries. The tent, also used for the People's Choice Awards on Saturday, is in the old bank lot at the corner of Main and Center streets in downtown Galax, where Lori is helping her husband, Jason Baumgardner. Jason is in the Chamber of Commerce, and in charge of the wing event.

Fairly soon, team members come in for a quick meeting, just like the one held an hour later in the Rex Theater for the Memphis Barbecue Network competitors. Some of the wing people are members of professional pork barbecue teams (but must compete under their own imprint, and pitmasters are barred); some are just in it for the chicken contest.

Jason goes over the rules: no breading, no frying (oil or air), no garnishes. Turn in times are 5:30-5:45 p.m. for traditional wings and 5:45-6 p.m. for exotic. They're a little flexible about this (there's no flexibility in the professional pork barbecue competition) but teams are expected not to be too late.

Another big one: this is an amateur contest. Members of professional teams are welcome to compete, but they must do so under a different name, and their pitmasters are excluded.

There are two categories: traditional and exotic. Traditional wings are basic barbecue or buffalo wings, and can include sauce and/or a dry rub. Exotic wings are anything outside this description, and can include a dry rub and/or a sauce. Sauces used in either case must be on the wings, not on the side. In both categories, third place gets \$50 and a plaque, second place gets \$100 and a plaque, and third place gets \$150 and a plaque.

The grand champion, a designation that can only go to a team that competes in both categories and scores \$200 on both, receives \$500, a plaque and free entry into next year's wing competition, not to mention the right to prance around with the chicken bling for a day (it must be returned Saturday for next year's use) and have their name etched onto the display trophy (which will also be reused next year).

Then the Baumgardners dole out chicken wings. The idea was three pounds per team, but with wings in five-pound bags and the electronic scale being iffy, everyone just gets a bag each. It doesn't change how many they have to turn in, or anything else about their entries; they just get more to work with and choose from.

Everybody smiles, gets their wings and scoots off.

The Competitors

Thesaurus.com offers 18 synonyms for heat, and you will need every last one of them to describe what it's like to walk around outside on Friday afternoon in down-

town Galax.

"Ninety-five degrees and sunny," though factual, doesn't quite cover it. With the fieriness coming off grills at every turn and the natural temperature, the heat feels like a personal insult. All you want to do is lie down in the shade and pant like a dog.

Which means, of course, the teams all remark how hot it is while merrily seasoning wings and getting grills lit. Hot weather, hot coals, hot sauce: they eat heat for breakfast. Everyone is cheerful and unbothered, the air almost shimmering with tantalizing spices as they joke and swig cold drinks and offer cooking tips and recipes.

(Note: Some information was gathered by email the week before the competition.)

"For years I toyed with the Patio Porkers," says Mike Bermingham of Galax, whose team name is Wing Nutz. They're in it for the wing competition only, because, he says, "I don't spend all nighttime cooking. I saw this and thought, hell, I could do it all in one day, and my family likes cooking chicken wings. For \$25, where can you have that kind of fun?"

Wing Nutz is offering extra wings in exchange for a donation to the Free Clinic of the Twin Counties. They make three kinds of wings in general: a dry rub with brown sugar, onion, garlic, cayenne, salt and pepper; the same but with a Mexican brand of hot sauce, and a buffalo-style wing (though only two types can be in the contest).

"I love doing it," he says. "It's fun. We grill something at the house every Sunday."

Wing Nutz is in the same lot with the judging tent, and so is the competitor next to him, Jim the Wingman, aka Jim Fisher of Roanoke. Their grills are next to one another; they talk charcoal while getting ready. Jim has bowls of wings out front to share. One is smoky but dry; the other is also smoky, but in a hot, slightly sweet sauce. Like the Berminghams, the Fishers are gracious and happy to see people come by.

"Full disclosure, this is new to me. I'm still not sure what to expect," says Eric King of Uncle Dubby's Backyard BBQ, from Matoaca in Chesterfield County. "I've been an avid grilling enthusiast, I've always had really good results."

One day, he says, he decided to look into competitions just to see what was out there, and found the MBN competition list on their webpage. He competed in West Virginia and then came to Galax, where he's also competing in the Patio Porkers (amateur pork) division of Smoke on the Mountain.

"My traditional wings are just a regular basic buffalo, which is hot sauce and butter, more or less," he says. "I don't have a top secret recipe, but I have a rub I've thrown together and taste-tested and tweaked over the years."

King continues, "Then, as far as the exotic, it was a last-minute decision but the flavor profile I've decided on is raspberry chipotle. I've wanted something different."

He doesn't mind sharing



From top, left to right: Jason Baumgardner shows off the No Pro Wing Show grand champion medal, teams prepare their entries and judges taste the results.

Gazette photos by Shannon Watkins

this because, he says, "I'm not to the level of top secret and looking over my shoulder."

There's not time to get to all 14 teams, and most of them are pretty busy, but there's some basic info from a few more: the all-female Trainwreck team (operating under the Nervous Wreck professional team) are doing "natural" wings for traditional and a cilantro sauce for the exotic; Lebowski's Li'l Urban Achievers is doing a traditional sweet and tangy wing with a little heat and an exotic Jamaican jerk; DC Grillers, operating under the Smokewagon professional team, is doing a dry rub for the traditional wings and a sweet-spicy mixture of three sauces for the exotic; Just Wingin' It, of the Smoke Masters professional team, is doing a basic traditional barbecue sauce and an exotic Asian-style wing; Paul Gofroth of PG Cookers, under the professional King's Cooking team, will also do a traditional barbecue wing and an Asian for exotic; Snowstorm, of the professional Parrothead Porkers, are doing a simple traditional wing and the same for the exotic, except with a peach barbecue sauce.

(After the judging, Snowstorm will serve up great big plates of wings done in both their styles, along with exceptionally good side dishes of baked beans with ground beef mixed in and a bacon lattice on top, and a potato salad that is the most perfect example of itself you will ever taste.)

Wandering around to find the teams, you hear acoustic honkytonk songs drift up from Jacob Melton's one-man performance on South

Main Street. Everyone along the row of vendors' tents nods from the shade.

On West Grayson Street is Boonetown BBQ (Boone, N.C.), whose whole hog entry is splayed out wide open on a table. Jeff Lamont trims bits and pieces off the pig, keeping up a stream of conversation with his partner, Joey Lucas. They're nice people and smile at you as you pass. It's both gruesome and sort of pleasant.

You try to find as many teams as you can, but the heat will eventually drive you indoors for a while.

The Judging

The judging takes place in the People's Choice tent, as well. Judges are mostly regular citizens and a few MBN judges who agreed to participate. Like the professional event, the entries are double-blind, and the judges eat from thick paper rectangles numbered and divided for each wing.

Everyone must remain silent during the judging and ranking. In these respects, it's every bit as serious as the pork competition.

Entries are doled out by the Baumgardners, who never sit, even when there's nothing to do but wait. Cold bottled water, paper towels and wet wipes are passed around as needed. Everyone frowns thoughtfully while chewing. Not everyone has professionally-trained tastebuds, but everyone wants to do a good job as a judge.

There's nothing dramatic to see, otherwise. If you're around after the judges leave and nobody minds, you might be allowed to sample the leftover wings. Since the judges

are allowed to request extras if they like an entry, some boxes have fewer wings in them, just like there will be varying amounts of pork leftovers tomorrow.

The ones with the fewest might be the best, but you still won't know whose they are.

Try a few leftovers and you will immediately understand the difficulty of judging. Chicken wings are like pizza, in that most are at least good enough to finish. Unless you have absurdly high standards, only a very few of them aren't worth a second bite. The ones that aren't are underdone, or very bland.

The other problem with chicken wings is in the seasoning. Almost everybody's have a mostly savory dry rub, and the exotic ones almost all have a sweet but spicy sauce. That's an accurate description of any chicken wings you could get, anywhere. There are only so many types of sauce or extra flavors most people add.

So, the difficulty is either in standing out with a really unexpected flavor profile, or having such perfect execution that what would be an average approach suddenly becomes archetypal.

A couple entries manage to pull off the latter. Crispy and just charred enough on the outside, beautifully juicy within, savory enough to play off the sweetness of both caramelized skin and an assertive sauce. These draw the palate back, again and again.

But the tent needs to be cleared, as the Baumgardners have to compile scores. It's still blazing out, although mercifully a little breezier now.

The Winners

At 8 p.m., the stage area is crowded with people waiting for both the winners and The Tams' beach music show that follows. The ceremony, led by Jason, is jovial and brief. Everyone comes up to applause, and gets a plaque and a check.

Third place in the traditional category is Wing Nutz. Second place is Snowstorm Barbecue. First place is Barbecuties, comprised of women from Ranucci's Big Butt BBQ, a professional team out of Charlotte, N.C.

Third place in the exotic category is Snowstorm Barbecue, second place is Wings R Us and first place is the Barbecuties again.

Their entry in traditional was a "barbalo," a regular sweet barbecue sauce combined with a buffalo sauce. Their exotic wings were Asian sesame.

"As some of you may have figured, Barbecuties is the grand champion of our inaugural wing contest," says Jason.

The Barbecuties — Zoe, Cathy, Mila and Giada, all with the same last name, Ranucci — clap and laugh and are pleased. The chicken necklace is placed on their youngest member, Giada.

All 14 teams are thanked for participating; a few people move away, the contest finished for the year. Many choose to stay and enjoy the show.

The heat breaks a little, finally.

See Wednesday's edition for more from Smoke on the Mountain.



Lowgap

Continued from Page 1A

Martin's body. Hiatt said the investigation is ongoing.

The body has been sent to Wake Forest Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem for an autopsy and identification, Hiatt said.

Martin was working out of town at the time he disappeared. Police said he was dropped off near Brintle's Truck Stop in Mount Airy, at Exit 100 on Interstate 77, on Aug. 19, 2018. He never arrived home,

and his mother reported him missing.

At first, police believed Martin was a fugitive, as he was on probation at the time of his disappearance and was wanted on probation violations, according to The Mount Airy News.

In December 2018, the sheriff's office, Dobson Police Department and a special agent with the SBI searched several areas in Surry County for Martin's body.

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