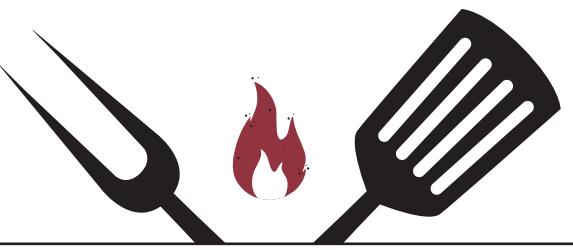




PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASTRI WEE



# KISSED WITH FIRE

ASHBURN MAN TURNS LOVE OF GRILLING  
INTO A NEW CAREER

BY CHRIS WADSWORTH



shburn backyards are full of grills and would-be grill gurus. Every nice weekend in the summer, hundreds, even thousands, of local residents fire up their grills and pile them high with burgers, ribs, steaks, you name it. It's as Ashburn — and as American — as apple pie.

But not every griller takes it to the next level and turns grilling into a lucrative and rewarding career. Meet Matthew Eads, better known as the "Grillseeker." He has parlayed a life-long love of grilling into writing a best-selling book, gaining tens of thousands of followers on social media and making local and national television appearances across the country.

"When I tell people I cook meat for a living, it's always met with the same response: 'How do I get that job?'" said the 47-year-old resident of Ashburn Overlook off Belmont Ridge Road.

It's been quite a journey. Eads was raised outside Detroit and remembers hanging out with his best friend at a fort they had built in the woods. Tired of bologna sandwiches, the duo decided to up their game.

"Our fort was the Taj Mahal of forts, and we built a grill out there. I 'borrowed' my mother's cast iron pan and we made our first meal — bacon, eggs and potatoes — over a fire on the grill we built ourselves," Eads said. "I knew from that moment on that I was hooked on grilling over live fire, and I've been passionate about it ever since." ▶



BY ASTRI WEE

**See next page for Matthew's  
THE BEST SMOKED  
MAC 'N' CHEESE recipe**



(Left top to bottom) Matthew Eads with "Today" guest host Heather McMahan and host Hoda Kotb; Eads appearing on Fox News; Eads videotaping an infomercial for a grilling product; Eads' first book. (Right) Eads during his time in the Marines.

Eads kept on grilling. He was grilling when he joined the Marines at 17, and he was grilling when he left his military career to enroll at Penn State at age 30. He was grilling when he started a new career with General Electric, and he was grilling when he started to get the itch to make a change.

"I was 40 years old, and I basically realized I was paying a nanny to raise my youngest daughter," said the father of three girls. "I knew that I wanted to do something else."

That's when one of his daughters suggested he launch an Instagram page with photos of all the amazing dishes he makes on the grill — not just meats, but side dishes like grilled beans, grilled macaroni and cheese and even grilled desserts.

"Most people think about grilling as being only meat over very high heat," Eads said. "That's a misconception. You can control the zones of heat in your grill and use it just like an oven. You can make grilled banana splits, grilled angel food cakes. I even do a tortilla that is filled with all the things in a s'more. When you take a food that isn't normally kissed with fire and flame and smoke, it brings it to another level."

With beautiful photos of his amazing dishes, Eads' social media page took off, and soon companies started sending him products like sauces and rubs to try out and hopefully promote. These became paid endorsements, and a burgeoning business was born.

"When I started this gig, I made a promise to myself to not promote any product, for any amount of money, that I wouldn't feel proud to give as a gift to a friend or family," he said. "That stands true today."

Eads started a website and a blog and found there was a huge audience for his recipes, tips and techniques. That's when Utah-based Cedar Fort Publishing came calling. They were interested in doing a book with Eads about grilling. "Grill Seeker: Basic Training for Everyday Grilling" was published in April 2019 and soon became a bestseller. On Amazon, it not only reached No. 1 among grilling and barbecue books but also reached No. 8 out of all books.

"Grill Seeker is our best-selling cookbook and in high demand," said Dru Huffaker, executive vice president of sales



Eads said he normally doesn't feel any nerves before a TV appearance but going on the "Today" show rattled him a little bit.

"I met ['Today' host] Hoda Kotb maybe three minutes before we went live, and I thought, 'Holy crap, that's Hoda.' She sensed I was nervous and looked me dead in the eye and said, 'You're here because you deserve to be here,'" Eads recalled. "I really appreciated her saying those words. I thought, 'You're right. Let's do this.' And we had a great time. After we wrapped, everyone in the studio came over and they were all eating the food and they loved it. For me, that's the biggest accolade."

Eads moved to Ashburn from Fairfax County last year during the peak of the pandemic. The social distancing means he hasn't met too many people so far, but at least some of his new neighbors have discovered his magical talents.

The cookbook begat a series of television appearances. First stop was Richmond, then D.C., and soon Eads was appearing on morning news programs in Chicago, Arizona, Los Angeles and elsewhere. "Fox & Friends" on the Fox News Channel was his first national appearance, followed by a cooking demonstration on NBC's "Today" show.

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"I love barbecue. When I was pregnant, I ate barbecue for nine straight days. Nothing comes between me and my barbecue," said Carol Corneby, who lives two doors down from Eads. "He made me a rack of pork ribs with a thick Kansas City barbecue sauce. It

was sweet and tangy, and the meat was very tender. It was just perfect."

The future for Grillseeker LLC is as bright as one of Eads' red hot flames. He has already written his second grilling cookbook. It's currently scheduled to be released in April 2022 — just in time for Memorial Day, Father's Day and the summer grilling season. And a third book is in the works as well. Longer term, Eads is in the beginning stages of working on his own spice and sauce product line. And for a guy who calls TV his "sweet spot," he'd love to one day do something with the Food Network or other culinary television channels.

"The fact that I am able to share my passion and impart it to other people is everything," Eads said. "I literally go to sleep at night — and wake up every morning — thinking about what I can create on the grill." □

**You can see more of Eads' recipes and culinary creations at his website: [www.grillseeker.com](http://www.grillseeker.com).**



MATTHEW  
EADS'

## THE BEST SMOKED MAC 'N' CHEESE

### INGREDIENTS

16 oz. cavatappi pasta (or elbow macaroni)  
8 oz. extra sharp cheddar cheese, shredded  
8 oz. Gruyere cheese, shredded  
1/2 tsp. chicken bouillon powder  
5 tbsp. salted butter  
2 tbsp. of all-purpose flour  
2 cup heavy whipping cream  
2 cup milk  
2 tsp. salt, or to taste  
1/2 tsp. cayenne pepper, or to taste  
1/2 tsp. fresh ground black pepper  
1/2 tsp. garlic powder  
2 tbsp. parsley, finely chopped

### DIRECTIONS

- 1:** Light grill or smoker and set up for indirect heat. Establish temperature at 225° F.
- 2:** Cook pasta on a stovetop, according to the box's instructions, but for only half of the recommended time in order for the pasta to be al dente. Drain pasta through a colander, reserving 1/2 cup of the pasta water. Rinse pasta with cold water to stop the cooking process and set aside.
- 3:** In a large cast iron skillet over medium heat on the stovetop, add butter and let it melt. Once melted, whisk in flour to make a roux. Cook over medium heat for 3 minutes stirring constantly.
- 4:** To the roux, whisk in milk, cream, pasta water, chicken bouillon, salt, cayenne pepper, black pepper, and garlic powder. Continue whisking for an additional 5 minutes, until steam is rising off the mixture.
- 5:** Remove from heat and add in shredded cheeses, continue to stir until they are melted thoroughly. Mixture will be very thin at this point.
- 6:** Pour macaroni into cheese sauce and fold together, then place in preheated grill or smoker over indirect heat. Add maple wood chunks to hot coals and allow pasta to smoke for one hour, stirring about every 15 minutes.