

Bryan Schaaf:

Back here on the Meat Speak Podcast powered by the Certified Angus Beef brand. If you are following along, we have dictated that sausages require not one but two full episodes devoted to them. Today we have reached and we have gone straight to the top. Our guest today has been featured across the United States and Canadian television food centric networks, is a well-known writer and blogger and was featured in the Kansas City Barbecue Society's 25th Anniversary Cookbook. She's also won more awards than you can shake a churrasco sword at including being a former world pork champion and world bacon champion and is the current two-time reigning world sausage champion at the American Royal. Please welcome to the show, Danielle Bennet also known as the Diva Q. How are you doing?

Danielle Bennet:

Hey Bryan, thanks so much for having... What an introduction. Thanks so much for having me on. I appreciate that, that was very kind.

Bryan Schaaf:

Oh my gosh. It's one of those things... We have a lot of different people who join us on the podcast, we're entering season two, and when people found out that you were going to be on... You probably know this already, but you're quite the draw.

Danielle Bennet:

Well you know, everybody loves meat.

Bryan Schaaf:

Amen. Amen. And if they don't, we don't associate with them anyways.

Danielle Bennet:

I just don't understand them.

Bryan Schaaf:

Well, before we get into the crux of where we're at, right. In episode one, if you want to go back and give it a listen, really got into the science behind the sausage and what makes it and all those different things. Today, we want to talk to somebody who has the trophies to say, "Hey, I make it better than anybody else." But before we dig there, tell us about how you became the Diva Q please.

Danielle Bennet:

Well a lot of people don't realize, I actually had a whole career before barbecue. I'm going into year 15 in barbecue. I actually have double degrees in business marketing, a three year one, and also a human resource operations management. I did that corporately for 10 years first. So other than people seeing me usually in a baseball cap and a T-shirt and capris and cowboy boots or whatever, I used to rock stiletto heels and the business suit almost every day so it's been quite a difference.

Danielle Bennet:

So in 2006, I actually... I've always been a really intense home-cook. I've been a "from scratch", had taken a whole bunch of independent culinary courses. Love, love, love to learn. I am one of those

veracious, kind of sponge peoples that I'm the type of person that goes into a grocery store, sees something I've never seen, I'll buy it no matter what it is, and then I'll go research the daylight out of it. It's how I just absorb my learning and creative process.

Danielle Bennet:

So in 2006, a friend of mine called me up and said, "Hey D, they're having something called a barbecue contest." The Canadian National Open and it happened to be in my hometown in Canada at the time which was Barrie, Ontario. And he said, "We should go." You had to apply to be a judge. Now my experience up to that point with barbecue was my parents had a gas grill, right. We're living in Central Canada basically in Ontario and other than my parents' trips to Florida, we had a place in Florida at the time for many, many years, we'd go to the roadside stands, we'd get an amazing pulled pork sandwich or some roadside chicken and whole bunch of that kind of stuff. And other than the occasional steak at home and hamburgers, I didn't have a lot of experience with southern-style barbecue.

Danielle Bennet:

And so I judged the 2006 Canadian Open and I thought to myself at that point, I had some really great barbecue, I had some okay barbecue, I had some barbecue I wouldn't feed a dog to that day and all I kept thinking was, "I'm pretty sure I can do this." And three days later I bought my first smoker and that was the first of 65.

Danielle Bennet:

So when I go into something I tend to go in full on, both feet dive in, just totally absorb myself into the culture and the pursuit of knowledge. And one of the key things for me is because I was in Canada, it was even more challenging because there's not a heck of a lot of pit masters in Canada. We're not having a lot of that familial, fourth generation kind of stuff going on.

Danielle Bennet:

And so what I did was I got on a plane and I went to Texas. And I started learning from some of the most... They must have thought I was crazy, I'm pretty sure they did at that point. I started going... One of the first places I went was John Mueller Barbecue, Austin, Texas. He was one of the first people that ever taught me how to cook a brisket properly. I'd done a couple, they weren't good. And then the Black Family, Allie, the entire Black Family. I am forever in their debt. Seaside Market. We're talking legendary barbecue people. And I literally went to them and like, "Hey, can I please just talk to you for a couple hours. I just want to learn." And then I started taking some more formal classes and things like that. And then of course [inaudible 00:05:13] in culinary classes as well.

Danielle Bennet:

And so that's how it happened. And then three months after that first judging, I actually entered my very first backyard contest and I got a 3rd in ribs and that was it. It was game over at that point. Totally game over. I'm like, "Oh yeah, we're in. We are so..." You spend \$2,000 in supplies and getting equipment for a 99 cent basically Dollar General trophy and you could not be any happier. So that's the beginning of Diva Q and what happened was that I had always been a public speaker for the companies that I was working with and my clients and always a teacher because of the human resources side of it. You're always teaching managers. I had managed 27 to 29 million dollar budget. I had 174 employees, the managers and things like that. We'd be scheduling. I did a collective agreement bargaining a lot so I don't have a lot of fear of talking, in general.

Danielle Bennet:

And so what happened was is that once I started winning... Because if I'm going to research, I'm going to start to win. If you're not winning, you're learning. Right? And that's how I look at life. If I'm not going to win, then I better learn something from the experience. And so what happened was that some producers started reaching out to me regularly, like these morning producers, morning show. Like, "Hey, we hear you're some woman that doing barbecue." And it was always "some woman", "some woman doing barbecue" because it's always a guy. It's always a guy. And that's how it happened.

Danielle Bennet:

And the name the Diva Q actually came from my best friend and I. We we're sitting there drinking a bottle of wine in the backyard, right early on in my career and we were trying to come up with a team name. And you can't be a diva in barbecue because you've got to slug your own meat, you've got to be able to prove yourself. So Diva Q, even though I have my nails done 24/7 and I'm a mani-pedi girl every two weeks regularly, despite that, Diva Q is actually an oxymoron because you can't be a diva. I'm slugging my own meat, I'm hauling grills and bags of pellets and supplies and doing it all myself and driving from one side of the United States to the other by myself multiple of times with my truck and my trailer. And so Diva Q is actually an oxymoron but it also means just that I'm fierce and I'm not really afraid of much.

Danielle Bennet:

And that's basically the Reader's Digest condensed version of Diva Q. I mean the TV shows came along, book proposals, book people, so many productions and I'm like, "Yeah, not for me. Yes for me. Eh." That's it. That's pretty much it. Okay. And here we are almost 15 years later.

Bryan Schaaf:

That's amazing. And one of the things that I appreciate about you, much like our friend Jess Priels and some other folks like that, is that to your point, you're not just somebody who's really good marketing. The substance behind what you do, right. You've got the trophies to back it up, the knowledge, you teach classes all the time from people just thirsting for your knowledge. Your travel schedule, up until these last seven or so months, is pretty intense right?

Danielle Bennet:

Yeah. Typically, on an average year, God bless Delta because I'm a Platinum girl, and they let me keep it for another year just because, 275,000 miles on planes. Last year it was over 4,000 students and that didn't include a couple corporate clients too, private corporate clients. So I love to teach. I love to pass on what's happening to the meat, why is it breaking down, how can we improve that, where are we going to take this meat if we do this, if we do that. And it's that constant trying to figure it all out. I literally am such a sponge, I listen to your expertise and the team's expertise and Certified Angus Beef for many years. Beef [inaudible 00:08:58], oh my gosh, a rock star in my world. Oh my God, that woman is amazing. Her husband, The Doctor.

Danielle Bennet:

Seriously, everybody has their... I don't get impressed with celebrities. I have so many celebrity phone numbers now because they reach out because of barbecue. They don't impress me, no offense to any of

them. They're all good in their own little worlds but the people that are rock stars in my world are my friends from Texas A&M in the meat sciences department. Okay.

Danielle Bennet:

It is the Certified Angus Beef, Beef [inaudible 00:09:24], and The Doctor because I'm like, "Oh, that is so cool. So that's where it comes from." And "Oh my God. I had no idea that's the part of the cow it came from. Seriously? It doesn't even look like it belongs there." And I'm one of those people where I'll sit there, I'll watch it 20 times in a row and some people, "Well I don't..." By the way, I don't have cable so I don't actually watch TV. I watch science programs on food. That's it. I'm a total nerd about that and I'm good with it because I love figuring it out. Whether it's my recipe for crispy wings or what's going on with that brisket. Here's why I don't think you should flip it. Here's why I think you should flip it. Here's when you flip. All these things. That to me, gets me excited.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah. That's awesome. Hey, we appreciate you and Diana Clark is a regular listener so I know she's probably like, "Sweet, Diva Q thinks I'm cool."

Danielle Bennet:

Amazing. Oh, she's a rock star in my, absolute, true freaking rock star in my world. Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf:

Oh, that's amazing. Let's talk about sausage, right. And it's one of those things we've talked about the science behind it, what makes it unique? What's the best ways to cook it, the best ways to store it, the snap that comes with it? But you. Right. You are a two-time world champion in sausage. What's your take on sausage? I mean when you go to make a sausage, what separates what you do from the rest?

Danielle Bennet:

Well I think it's an OCD kind of component for me because I like to try everything. Right? So, I ran just an insane amount of tests here at the house and I was formulating different components for fat, what kind of fat I was putting in my sausage. Was it a mix of just straight pork? What is a mix of pork and beef? There was literally so much ground meats kicking around my house and everything had different plate sizes, right, so I was trying to figure out the bite and the textural components. And then, of course I've got a whole bunch of grills here, and I was kind of working on which grill. Do I smoke it first? Do I just go for a high sear? What temperature am I looking for?

Danielle Bennet:

And so it's kind of controlling all those factors and then deciding to... And then I put one hell of creative spin on it and I'm never going to talk about that but putting my own creative spin on it and saying, "That's pretty damn good." Like, "This is working out really well." And then doing it again six more times because you have to... At the American Royal, you're not dealing with your perfect outdoor... My outdoor kitchen here is, there's 20 grills here within my house and there're tables and there's all your tools. You're at the American Royal under a tent basically and so you kind of have to be able to recreate it under a little different circumstances.

Danielle Bennet:

Okay. So now instead of having my refrigerators, I've got commercial fridges and freezers here at the house, can I do this inside my Yeti? Can I put a tray of ice? Can I chill it down? And so what I ended up doing was I actually tried... Are you ready for this? I will say this about my recipe, I actually traveled with my sausage ground and cased all the way to Kansas from Florida. You don't have to make your sausage on site or anything like that, it just has to arrive at a raw stage. So that's what I did. I actually assembled it all and then I added a couple of more components when I got to Kansas knowing that they were available there and went from there. And like I said, it's two times back to back. 180 in sausage, that's no joke. That's not a fluke. It's kind of nice.

Bryan Schaaf:

Right. Oh, yeah. Well okay, and without divulging exactly what that is, if we could sort of turn this on its head little bit and just say, "If you're making a sausage at home. What's your jam? What's your go-to?"

Danielle Bennet:

The thing is, is that I got to spend so much time in Texas and right when this all started happening, the lovely COVID, I had actually been looking for a second house in Texas. One hour outside of Houston because I don't want to live in Houston, Houston's too expensive and it's too busy. So I was looking for a house one hour out, in the circumference basically of Houston, and the reason is, no joke, I love my friends there so much and Texas has truly I think some of the best sausage in the nation. And I'm not putting down everybody else, I don't want anybody think I'm bashing them.

Danielle Bennet:

However, the original settlers of Texas, they brought so many incredible recipes for sausage and sausage making and my go-to at home is I kind of like to try to replicate that half link, that half-hanged link. And then in addition, figuring out how to do the cheddar jalapeno, the cheddar hatch, I'm a huge fan of those. I literally have had much sausage and stuff shipped to my house here. And also experimenting trying to replicate it. I like the finer grind personally. I really enjoy that textural component for me personally. I think it just breaks nicely and all-natural casing always. I don't like the other casing at all. At all. I love natural casings for sausage whether they're beef or pork. And I like an all-natural pork casing on a beef sausage as well. You have options for everything, right. But definitely the finer grind. Definitely with an ode to Texas always.

Bryan Schaaf:

Excellent. Excellent. You just kind of touched on it but we're pretty proud at Certified Angus Beef. The chef who is the executive chef of our Culinary Center is Ashley Breneman. Our chief meat scientist is Diana Clark. This movement of women in meat, women in barbecue, it's not something that you see a whole lot. Is there a little bit of extra pride that you're kind of flying that flag of, "You know what? This isn't just a man's game anymore."

Danielle Bennet:

Well, I think one of the things is is that it's not so much as extra pride. I think it's just opening up doors of opportunity. One of the most rewarding things I get... And I get a lot of fan mail and I get some hate mail and I get whole bunch of all across the board of things. One of the key things though that can make my day, and literally it has, is when I get an email or a letter, a fan letter, or sometimes it's a Tweet or an Instagram and I'm tagged in something that says, "You know, I saw her do it. So I thought I could to."

Danielle Bennet:

That to me is worth so much. I've raised strong, young women. I have two daughters and a beautiful stepdaughter as well and I want them all to be fierce as hell. I want them to not ever have barriers whatever their industry. Whatever their career goals are. Whatever their personal goals are. I think the second you can identify somebody in that category of life that isn't the norm but it is your norm, then I think you're opening opportunities for that person to succeed and go after their goals.

Danielle Bennet:

And so there isn't very many women. I mean in the competitive world of barbecue, very few. As I am the only person that's ever been given an O-1 visa, U.S. visa, as a barbecue expert in the history of the United States. And I happen to be a female from Canada of all places. I don't if that's standing anymore but it was accurate a couple years ago. And that was a point of pride because then you could see other chefs going, "Wait a second. She can do it, why can't I do it?"

Danielle Bennet:

Going on Pitmasters and winning, "Well she can do it, I can do it." Hosting a three year show on the Travel Channel called BBQ Crawl and it wasn't hosted by a guy because it's always, "Wah! Wah! Wah! I'm the man. And men and meat and wah, wah, wah." Now I'm a female, I like my nails done and there's this lovely saying... I'm not a tomboy. I'm not a girly-girl. I like sling knives regularly, set things on fire. That makes me happy. Shoot guns. Go hunting.

Danielle Bennet:

But seeing people that are female in that industry makes me happy. It makes me happy because it's removing more barriers for other women, other young women, to look up to people and say, "You know, because I saw you, I knew I could do it. Or I knew I had at least an opportunity to do it if I applied myself." I think that's probably one of the most rewarding things about my entire life actually is getting those emails and those letters and things like that. Because when I started, I mean there was...

Danielle Bennet:

When I started almost 15 years ago, there was literally, I can think of two women. Two. Two. There may be 12 of us now. Okay. There's not a lot of... We're not talking about a ton of growth here but one of the women, and she's now since passed on, her name was Karen Putnam, Flower of the Flames, and that was BBQ team and she had done really well at the American Royal. And I reached out to her very early in my career and asked a million of the stupidest questions now looking back and she never once made me feel like an idiot, she never once made me feel like I was less because I was a female asking all of these ridiculously... And looking back now, boy did I ask some dumb ones. But you know what? She was an absolute role-model for me knowing that, "Hey, if this woman can do it, I'm pretty sure I got this too." And her sister, Ronna...

Danielle Bennet:

So when you see and have access to people like that and that visual and they're not just some BS Instagram influencer that's doing a stage perfect picture. That's somebody who can actually cook the meat, can actually execute it. [inaudible 00:19:15] no, no. I've got 180s in brisket and I've got 180s in this. And I don't compete very much at all. I mean, I do maybe one or two a year now but in the years

that I did, I went out. I was respected. And I applied as much knowledge as I could and that makes me happy.

Bryan Schaaf:

Excellent. Well said. Well said. Hey, before...

Danielle Bennet:

[crosstalk 00:19:35] here's the goal though. The goal eventually is to never have the interview where that question is asked.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yep.

Danielle Bennet:

Because then we achieved equality at that point.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah because to your point, there are more women in BBQ now, but you can still probably think of just about all of them. And so, to get to the point where there's so many that you don't even think to count that.

Danielle Bennet:

Exactly. So that it's not an oddity, it's just commonplace. Right? And I'm known for not being shy about speaking my opinions on things. I don't play the game very well. I don't schmooze very well. And that makes me stand out a little bit more because I'm like, "No, that's not why. I'm not going to agree with you just because you're a guy." That's not how I role. And you can see it on also the mansplaining that goes on. I'm like, "Are you kidding me dude? Like, come on." And it's so funny because now I don't respond to them but my fans do like, "Dude, do you know who you're talking to? She knows how to cook a steak, you do not need to tell her how to cook a steak."

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah. Check the trophy room.

Danielle Bennet:

It is what it is. If they want to learn, all the power to them.

Bryan Schaaf:

Amen. Amen. You're more than willing to teach. Before we wrap can you give us a quick run down for all the folks listening who maybe don't already follow you. Where can people find you? Where can people buy your book? Can you kind of give us that run down?

Danielle Bennet:

Well the book is available, it is going into it's fourth or fifth year here. Thank God people. I really appreciate all the sales. The book is available on Amazon, that lovely thing we all order from. It's also

available with my partners at ThermoWorks and of course my biggest partner which is Traeger Grills, it's available on all their websites. You can find me on every social media channel possible so if you just Google "Diva Q" trust me, Instagram will come up, Twitter will come up, my Facebook will come up. And it's always Diva Q BBQ and it's the same name across all my platforms. And we cook live four or five times a week on Facebook while we're here at home. Posting almost daily on Instagram as well.

Danielle Bennet:

And if somebody has a question if they want to, we're revamping the website right now, but if somebody has a BBQ question or a question on where to find resources for meat and things like that, I always like to say, "Send me a DM." I actually have an SEO person but I answer 99% of them myself, personally. And you know what, reach out and ask some questions because I love to help people along their BBQ journey. That's one of the most rewarding things. Out of all the things I've done in BBQ besides getting those letters where I inspire people, which is nice, out of all the TV I've done...

Danielle Bennet:

People always ask me, "Why haven't you done more TV?" And the reason is this, not because of a lack of opportunities because I love teaching more than I love TV. In all honesty. It is something so rewarding to connect the dots in regards to meat, meat science, application of heat and smoke, and making people backyard rock stars because I love doing that. I love, love, love getting those email going, "My dad or my father-in-law came over and he just told me I made the best ribs ever. I literally ruled my entire family reunion." Or whatever. I love that kind of stuff because that's a point of pride for that person. So helping people make them into backyard rock stars, it's just such a dream. It's awesome. It's awesome.

Bryan Schaaf:

Amen. Amen. Well on that note, we do appreciate everyone at home giving us a listen here. Please, please, please take a minute, follow Diva Q across all of your major social media platforms except probably Myspace I assume. Right? That's still...

Danielle Bennet:

I'm going into my 47th year, I'm pretty sure I got rid of that at least 25 years ago.

Bryan Schaaf:

But please give Diva Q a follow. Danielle Bennet as she is probably better known to her family and close friends. To the rest of the world Diva Q. Thank you so much for joining us here on the Meat Speak podcast. We're going to take a quick break and when we come back, we're actually going to sit down with another fierce female of barbecue but we're going to talk about beer pairings with sausages. Kristina Gaardbo from Chicago Culinary Kitchen is coming up next here on the Meat Speak podcast powered by the Certified Angus Beef brand.

Bryan Schaaf:

Right here on the Meat Speak podcast powered by the Certified Angus Beef brand talking all things sausage and on the line here with me all the way from Palatine, Illinois, one half of the brain trust that is Chicago Culinary Kitchen. But I'll tell you what, before we give you the name I'm going to let you know Chicago Culinary Kitchen has received so many awards and distinctions most recently being named the best barbecue in Illinois by Money Magazine. They've also been featured on Cooking Channel's Man Fire

Food and the Big Bad BBQ Brawl. Today joining me is a wealth of knowledge of all things barbecue and also a favorite subject of mine, beers, Kristina Gaardbo. Kristina, how are you doing?

Kristina Gaardbo:

I'm doing awesome. How are you doing?

Bryan Schaaf:

Oh, we are living the dream. Chicago Culinary Kitchen first, I happen to catch you on a great day. What's the news that you guys just got?

Kristina Gaardbo:

We got our permits approved to start our build out for our new location. Only been like two months in the running, waiting on them.

Bryan Schaaf:

Damn, new location of CCK. If you don't know CCK, holy cow, you've got to check it out. It's a party every Friday, I'm sorry every Saturday and Sunday. Just outside of Chicago limits I guess just outside of O'Hare. You show up, you wait in line, you get your food, when they run out of food they're out of food. Good luck next time, right? But it's all the best things in life under one roof. It's meat, beer, fire, skulls, rock and roll. You guys are just killing it. Before we dive into the subject of the day, can you give us the story of CCK and how it came to be because you guys, yourself and your husband Greg, you guys didn't necessarily follow a restaurant path that I think anybody has probably been on.

Kristina Gaardbo:

No, probably not. I actually left my nursing degree to start a restaurant with my husband. We had been doing a lot of backyard entertaining with friends and family, cooking the old beer can chicken on the Texas Weber, and our big beer, craft beer fridge, people coming and leaving their crap beer like Miller and Stella and they drink all of our great stuff. Which led to the beer bum box. We would take that box of crap beer anytime we'd go downtown to get tattooed and we'd leave it for the bums. And they absolutely loved it. We'd give them food sometimes too, but beer's better.

Kristina Gaardbo:

So we got started entertaining friends and family in the backyard. My husband wanted to do barbecue and I said, "No, absolutely not. Everyone does barbecue. We're going to nickle and dime." So I sent him back to the drawing board and he came back to me with churrascos which is Brazilian barbecue. Long story short of that we now have three of those and we have the largest Brazilian-style catering company in the United States. And that led to us getting a commissary which is the current location of Chicago Culinary Kitchen, 773 North Quentin Road in Palatine.

Kristina Gaardbo:

That was in 2014. Fast-forward to 2016, my husband and I both miss barbecue and beer and so we decided we'd open an event space. So Chicago Culinary Kitchen became the name. Original intent was that we would actually invite other chef in the Chicago land area to be able to come and use the space for their different cuisines and classes. Hence a very neutral name. But after being open, doing barbecue

and beer pair classes for three months, by popular demand we ended up opening as a barbecue and craft beer restaurant open Saturday and Sunday from 11 AM until sellout which is usually around 2-2:30.

Kristina Gaardbo:

And that was three and a half years ago. We've been in the running and now are finally expanding to a bigger restaurant and we'll be expanding our hours and days. We'll be doing Wednesday through Sunday, lunch and dinner and a special brunch menu on Sundays.

Bryan Schaaf:

Giddy-up. And it's one thing, I mean we've mentioned you were named best barbecue in Illinois and when you look at...

Kristina Gaardbo:

[inaudible 00:27:54].

Bryan Schaaf:

Two times?

Kristina Gaardbo:

Two years in a row.

Bryan Schaaf:

Two years running, best barbecue in Illinois and put that in perspective. It's not like you're best barbecue in North Dakota, right? No offense to folks in North Dakota but there are some of the titans of barbecue in the state of Illinois. Of course with 17th Street down all the way at Murphysboro. Right in Chicago is smoke, with Green Street Smoked Meats in Bub City. You guys brought home the title. That's got to feel like validation of everything that you guys have been pushing for isn't it?

Kristina Gaardbo:

Oh it's awesome. And you know what's funny is we usually hear about those accolades from our customers and not even... We don't even get to hear [inaudible 00:28:37] it's all of a sudden, "Wow, you guys are best barbecue in Illinois again." We're like, "Okay. Cool. Where?"

Bryan Schaaf:

Congratulations. I can't wait to come out your way. I think in about three weeks actually I'm leaving the state of Ohio for the first time since February. So giddy-up. One of the things that we wanted to talk to you about specifically, you guys, you and Greg, probably come up on this podcast in discussions as much if not more than anybody else just in passing conversations of different things that we're doing because the food that you guys push out is just... it's mind-blowing. But when we're talking about sausages and earlier we had a discussion with the two-time world champion in sausage, Danielle Bennet, also known as Diva Q.

Bryan Schaaf:

But for me, for a lot of people like me, if you're going to down the sausage route, you've got to have something to drink with it as well. And when I think about all things beer, right, love me some beer, I don't know that there is a greater authority on what you should be drinking, what you should be trying than yourself. I guess before we get into that, tell us about how you got into beer and kind of where you're at now.

Kristina Gaardbo:

All right. So skip way back, back, back before we even started talking about catering or having a restaurant. Back when we were doing backyard entertaining, my husband and I both got really big into craft beer. We were drinking everything we could find possibly, trying all the new breweries and we thought, "You know what? We love beer so much. It's fun, it's something cool to do. Let's brew beer."

Kristina Gaardbo:

So we actually, before we looked into building a restaurant, we wanted to brew beer and we did research looking for the different systems, looking to see who could assist us with everything. And again, this was hobby, right, so when the bill came back showing that the quote would be about a quarter of million dollars for the equipment before we had a place to put the equipment. Yeah, that's when we said, "Nope. Let's drink beer. Let's do barbecue. And then we can partner with breweries on beer and barbecue in the future. And then we can have the best of both worlds without having to brew the beer ourselves."

Kristina Gaardbo:

That led me into having a real passion for beer and I was really kind of taken back with how many different styles there are and how different they are from region to region as well as the history behind it. So I started doing a lot of studying on it and I found out that you can actually get certified as a cicerone which is basically like sommelier but for beer instead. Took me probably two years to study to get the certified cicerone aspect of it. The first level is easy, it's basically going to be your server. Just basic knowledge of tap lines and styles.

Kristina Gaardbo:

But the certified cicerone, I'd say four hour test. It's fill-in the blank, it's essay, it's a tasting panel. And it was a lot of work I actually did take it once a year before I got my cicerone I missed it by just a couple percentages and I was so mad. I'm like, "I'm not doing this." And then I finally was like, "You know what? I've got to finish it." Did a little more studying. Did a lot more drinking. And I passed it the second time around. There are two levels above me, an advanced cicerone and then a master cicerone. Master cicerone, you're talking there's maybe three or four in the world. Advanced cicerone, couple hundred. Certified cicerones, there's a decent amount but not a lot of females. I'm happy to be one of them.

Bryan Schaaf:

That's glorious. So in this restaurant that you and Greg operate, you guys cook up so much meat. Greg is right behind you. Bless you brother, bless you brother. You guys cook up a lot of meat, of different meat obviously we're always partial to the beef here but what are... Or can you give us an idea because I know you also make some sausages and the different flavor profiles that come with sausage. Is there a specific style, a specific type of beer that just feels good when you're drinking with sausage or does it really come down to one of those other components that are put inside the casing with the meat when it comes to sausage.

Kristina Gaardbo:

Depending on the sausage because like I said there's so many different beers and there's so many different sausages and there's ways to take the different nuances of the beer and pair it perfectly with the sausage that can compliment that or contradict it depending on what you want to build. For me though, after drinking IPAs for almost three years straight, I can't drink an IPA to save my life. So I'm much more into the malty beers and I love a good brown ale or a wee heavy, just definitely going to be a malty, sweeter beer and I think those go great with sausages.

Kristina Gaardbo:

But again, German beers because think about German and sausage, they go hand in hand together. So they do a lot more of the lagers, they do those Hefeweizens that have that banana and clove nuances in it. But for me, it's the alcohol and the carbonation is a palette cleanser by itself so when you're eating one of those rich sausages and your lips are kind of moist from the fat of that, you need something to cleanse your palette so that you can take a new bite and it actually feel like a new bite. You can't do that with wine. You can't do that with liquor. Water, there's water in beer.

Bryan Schaaf:

You're getting hydrated either way, right?

Kristina Gaardbo:

Exactly.

Bryan Schaaf:

Does that carry over? Obviously you mentioned German sausages, Chef Tony will say, he actually gives a lot of credit to Asian cultures for where sausages really first came from obviously starting as a preservation method. But what about when you get into some of those regions where they really like to load them up with a little more heat. Same rules apply or does that change the way that you look at this?

Kristina Gaardbo:

So if you really like heat and you're eating a spicy sausage and it's just not spicy enough, IPAs because that hop, that bitterness from the hop, will help intensify the spiciness of the dish that you're eating. Me again, I like more of a balance so I'm still going to go that malty beer, that sweeter beer that's going to help offer some balance and even kind of cool my mouth down while I'm eating the spicy sausage.

Bryan Schaaf:

Interesting. Now do you guys have any sausages that you're making right now on the menu?

Kristina Gaardbo:

Currently, no because we've got all the plans going for the new place and we're going to get a grinder for there and do more of own sausages. Currently, right now we're going a [inaudible 00:35:22] Texas sausage, it's got a black pepper profile. To me, that goes great with a scotch ale which is going to be a brown ale but a little bit more alcohol content, a little sweeter.

Kristina Gaardbo:

We also have a jalapeno cheddar sausage that we do. And to me, a lager for that one just because I like the way that the low malt, the white malt flavor goes with the cheese. It's almost like a grilled cheese sausage. A little of that malt flavor.

Bryan Schaaf:

That's fantastic. That's fantastic. Do you know we have a lot of, really just, we've got a lot of meatheads who listen to this show and I say that in the most endearing way possible. Right. We've got chefs, we've got butchers, we've got people who sell meat for a living, we've got people who really are doing a lot of the things that you guys would have done when you first started. Doing things in the backyard, feeding their neighborhoods and things like that. I'm going to tap into your robust beer knowledge as I do our mutual friend, Josh Moore down in Louisville, Kentucky, anytime I have him on the horn I always ask him what Kentucky bourbons, just as meatheads in general that we don't know about, what do we need to be participating in. I turn that on its head, you're talking to audience of carnivores here. People who eat meat whether it's sausage, whether it's rib-eye steaks or who knows what. Can you give me three or four beers that really would please those people that goes well that we haven't heard of?

Kristina Gaardbo:

That you haven't heard of?

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah.

Kristina Gaardbo:

Well you may have heard of it but you may not be able to get it Westvleteren 12. You can probably only get it in Europe so we're going to go ahead and skip that one. That is my favorite beer, I had the chance to drink three of them last time I was in Europe. [inaudible 00:37:09] but no for those meat-lovers, ones that you guys don't know... May or may not know Kentucky Bourbon Barrel. It is a larger brand name beer but to me that beer goes great with a seared steak. It's got some of those seared notes similar from the malts that you get in the meat when it's the Maillard reaction.

Kristina Gaardbo:

Other one, I'm a huge fan of Belgians. A Belgian one you might be able to get your hands on is Westmalle Dubbel. It is again, it's going to be a malty beer but it's not going to be sweet it's just going to be more malty. And then definitely, I'm trying to think of something that's more in the IPA family. One of my favorite breweries in Chicago is going to be Pipeworks and they have a wonderful pale ale called Lizard King. It goes great... It's lightly bitter with some citrus notes and it's going to help cleanse that palette, it'll brighten up some of those richer meats and cut through some of that fat. And then Oktoberfest is coming so a good heferweizen, paulaner brauerei, again German-style beer goes great with sausage and other meats.

Bryan Schaaf:

Well-said. Well-said. Before we wrap can you give us a little insight? You've already talked about the new space that you guys are building out, but what's in the future for CCK? Obviously you've got the churrasco, you've got the food truck, you've got a new space coming, what are you looking forward to?

Kristina Gaardbo:

I'm looking forward to the taco shop and margarita bar. We're keeping our original space and once we get open at the new space, we're going to do a face-lift and we're going to be doing our own taco concept with a margarita bar at the original location.

Bryan Schaaf:

Oh, the space that you're in right now?

Kristina Gaardbo:

Yep.

Bryan Schaaf:

Oh that made my day. That made my...

Kristina Gaardbo:

Welcome to [inaudible 00:38:57].

Bryan Schaaf:

Well I'll tell you what, before we roll give us the run down. Where's the new space going to be and what's your loose time table for hopefully pulling the trigger?

Kristina Gaardbo:

So we're staying in Palatine, lucky us, it's going to be at the corner of Lake Cook and North Hicks Road. 2391 North Hicks, it's right off 53. Major highway, easy access. We are still, fingers crossed, hoping to get open before the end of the year. We are having a big patio built so we're hoping that we can at least utilize some of that if we get opened soon enough. Greg just wants to be in before Thanksgiving so we have more room to do our awesome smoked turkeys.

Bryan Schaaf:

Well-said. Well-said. Good luck to you guys. For anybody who happens to be flying into Chicago O'Hare, highly, highly, highly recommend. It's two-fold. One, you get off a plane the last thing you want to do is get into your rental car and fight traffic heading towards Chicago. You guys are actually just kind of in the opposite direction like what? 10 minutes?

Kristina Gaardbo:

Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf:

So yeah, fly into O'Hare, get your rental, head out to Palatine which is in the opposite direction of downtown Chicago just by a little bit. Right. Feast. You'll feel better and then you can take on that hour and 15 time frame to drive 20 miles to downtown Chicago.

Kristina Gaardbo:

Fun, fun.

This transcript was exported on Sep 24, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

Bryan Schaaf:

Oh, excellent.

Kristina Gaardbo:

Just stay in the burbs.

Bryan Schaaf:

That's right, that's right. It's probably for the best. Well I tell you, Kristina Gaardbo from Chicago Culinary Kitchen out in Palatine. New concept hopefully opening up right around the corner from where they're at right now by the end of the year. Highly recommend checking them out. Kristina if you could, please pass our love along to Greg and the entire staff there. We love you guys. Thank you for taking time to join us on the Meat Speak podcast.

Kristina Gaardbo:

Thank you.