

MADE IN KANSAS

by Doug Worgul

Rob Russell competed for years in barbecue cooking competitions. He's owned some of the best barbecue smokers and equipment made.

Ace of Hearts BBQ Specialties, LLC



Ace of Hearts BBQ Specialties general manager Rob Russell (right) and Eight-Time American Royal Barbecue Grand Champion, Chris Marks (left) with the Good-One "Trail Boss" smoker and a whole lot of meat (center).

He's operated a successful barbecue restaurant and catering business. Rob Russell is a really good barbecue cook. He's also a really good dad. When his daughter's volleyball team needed to hold a fundraiser, Rob volunteered to cook 99 slabs of ribs for the girls to sell. Problem was all those fancy smokers couldn't hold all those slabs. He needed additional capacity.

"I knew my neighbor cooked in barbecue contests sometimes," says Russell. "So I asked him if I could use his smoker. I didn't know what kind it was, but I was desperate. Whatever he had, would be good enough. Well, he had a Good-One smoker. And after I used it for that fundraiser, I never went back to my other equipment. It was the best smoker I ever used. And I've used them ever since. I even became a distributor."

These days Russell gets paid to say such things. He's general manager of Ace of Hearts Barbecue Specialties in Topeka, which owns the Good-One product line. Russell was hired this spring by Joe and Judy Roetheli when they formed the company to expand the network of Good-One dealerships and to promote the brand nationwide.

The first Good-One smokers were built in 1988 in Burns (no kidding), Kansas, by the father and son team of Ron and Larry Goodwin. (Say it out loud: "Goodwin. Good-One." Clever, huh?) They've been perfecting the product ever since. The feature that differentiates the Good-One cookers from its competitors is its unique design.

"Most high-end smokers are built with the firebox set off to the side," says Russell. "That's why they call them 'off-set' smokers. The firebox on our smokers are 'back-set.' They run the length of the back of the smoke chamber. On an off-set smoker, the smoke and heat are drawn over the meat by the chimney opposite the firebox. This pulls the moisture out of the meat as the smoke and heat flow over it and out the chimney. On a Good-One, the heat and smoke are transferred directly to the meat by a baffle that regulates the temperature and the amount of smoke. It operates more like a convection oven. The moisture stays in the meat where it belongs. The design also is also much more efficient than other designs, meaning you don't need to use as much charcoal or wood, and you don't have to add more of it as often. They hold their cooking temperature for hours longer than other smokers. If you're cooking all-night at a competition or for a big family reunion that means you can get some shut eye."

All Good-One cookers are built with 7-gauge steel bodies and 11-gauge steel lids. Ace of Hearts offers cooking classes and instructional videos.