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New Kent

NEIGHBORS



Meet The
Bowles Family

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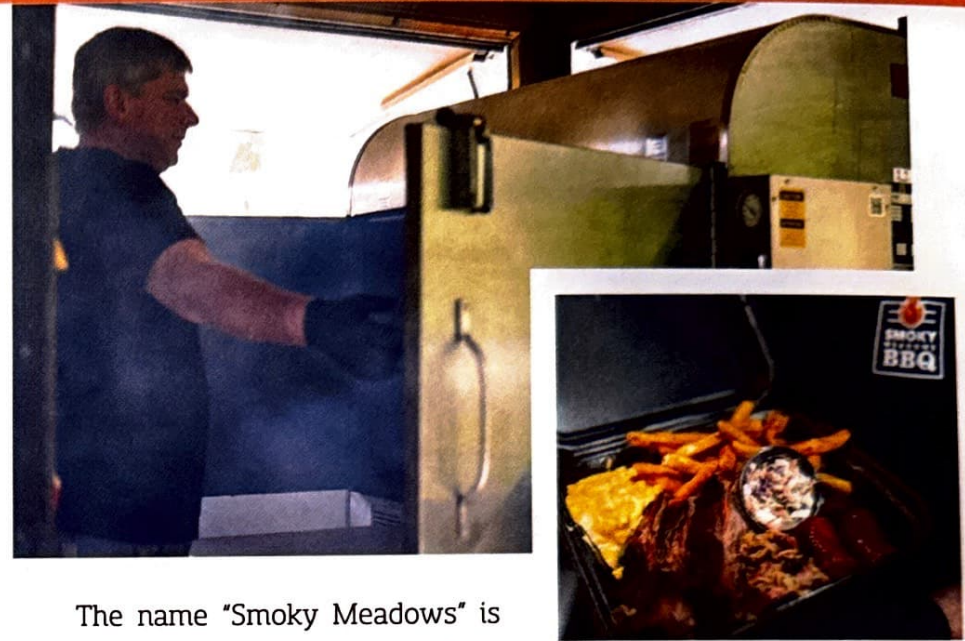
Serving Up More Than Just Great Food

By CJ McDonald

At Smoky Meadows BBQ, the scent of slow-smoked brisket and pulled pork isn't just about mouthwatering meals—it's the aroma of family, friendship, and giving back to a community they love. What began as a backyard tradition has grown into a family-owned mobile food trailer with a mission far beyond feeding hungry customers.

Melody and Tommy Meadows, the heart and soul behind Smoky Meadows BBQ, launched their business in September 2022 with more than just good food in mind. Inspired by years of cooking for large family gatherings and volunteer crews, "there was a call in the community for a new kind of BBQ experience - and we picked up the phone," Melody says.

Tommy, a machinist for over 36 years, was no stranger to building things—but food service was new territory. What wasn't new was his role as the go-to cook for every family function. "I started young," he says. "Every time there was an event, I was the one doing the cooking." After years of subpar restaurant meals and encouragement from Melody to "do something about it," he brought his precision and skill from the machine shop into the smoker—which he built himself. That level of craftsmanship is in everything they do.



The name "Smoky Meadows" is more than catchy branding—it's a family name. And that family element runs deep. Their oldest son, Joseph, is now part of the team, and their tight-knit staff is made up of close friends and locals. Even their youngest, Cooper, serves as the beloved mascot.

Melody, a nurse case manager by day and BBQ boss by night, has deep roots in New Kent. A proud graduate of New Kent High, she moved away as an adult but eventually came back to raise her family—and build a business grounded in local values.

Their food trailer, custom-designed by Melody herself, was picked up in February 2024 after months of planning. "I literally cut and pasted the design together," she laughs. "And we ended up with a 98% efficient layout." But even the best equipment couldn't prepare them for their first event on June 1. "We bombed," Tommy admits. "We fell flat on our face." A close friend, Ja-

mie, stepped in that day, rolled up her sleeves, and helped them turn things around. "She propped me up and helped me get over the first hump. That's what community looks like."

From then on, the momentum grew fast. Bookings came pouring in. So much so that by August—just three months into operating the trailer—Tommy officially retired from machining. On September 13, 2024, he traded his windowless factory for a food truck with fresh air and friendly faces. "I went from talking to nobody to talking to everybody," he says. "And I love it."

At the heart of Smoky Meadows' menu is a deep love for brisket. "Brisket. Period," Tommy says. "We do so many things with it—tacos, sandwiches, you name it." Their pulled pork is equally special, perfected with a homemade sauce that took over three years to develop. And they're serious about their wood—sourcing local hickory to keep everything authentic and flavorful.

They bring that flavor to all kinds of events—from weddings and holiday parties to soccer games and pop-ups on the corner of Dispatch and Route 249. "The trailer's made to move," says Melody, and move it does.



They've become a familiar face at community happenings, including collaborations with local favorites like Stroop's Ice Cream Truck and Boujee Board. One especially memorable effort was a family raffle fundraiser that raised money for an elementary school PTO and gave free ice cream to the students. "We didn't know these businesses before we started," Melody says. "Now they're loyal customers—and friends."

Their voice as a business is equal parts warm, hard-working and a little cheeky. "Sarcasm is free," Melody jokes. "We just want to put a smile on people's faces." And that tone resonates—from their social media to the food truck window.

The challenges of running a small business are real. There have been moments of doubt, burned brisket, and smoked-out setbacks. But the couple never lost faith in their path. "It's hard to make the right choices sometimes," Tommy says. "The wrong ones are easy."

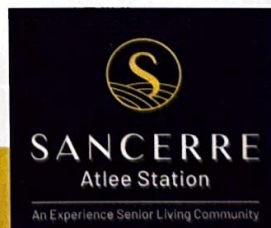
Through it all, they've kept showing up, owning their mistakes, and doing right by their customers.

Looking ahead, their dream is to open a brick-and-mortar location in New Kent—while keeping the truck mobile to serve events all over the region. But growth doesn't mean losing sight of their roots. "There's room for all of us," Melody says. "We believe in collaboration, not competition. We see other food vendors as community partners, not rivals. We don't need to be greedy. There's enough to go around."

At Smoky Meadows BBQ, food is just the beginning. It's a way to build connection, share stories, and show their kids what it means to work hard and be proud of what you build. In every bite of brisket and every laugh shared at the window, their mission is clear: serve good food, love people well, and always give back.

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