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FROM THE EDITOR

entries

# Confessions of a fame-seeker

BY KATY RYAN

Those who know me well know that in my spare time, I've been known to chase celebrities. Mostly musicians, but I'm not too picky. I tend to get starstruck around anyone famous, and the opening of Backfire BBQ featuring Orange County Choppers was no exception.

As I waited for the official garland cutting to signify the restaurant's grand-opening, I suddenly found myself face-to-face with Paul Teutul Sr., he of the massive, rippling biceps and starring role on reality show "American Choppers." Here's where I confess that, in all actuality, I have very little interest in motorcycles, choppers, or anything of the sort. Yet when faced with a real-life celebrity, I still found myself grinning ear-to-ear, snapping photos like crazy and sending out text messages with news of my in-person "meeting."

And to honor the Legends' newest restaurant, you'll find a conversation with Backfire BBQ creator Steve Schussler, a veritable icon in the restaurant industry. This issue of The Dot is jam-packed with other stories, too—a fitting way to kick off not just a new year, but a new decade.

Philanthropic organizations take center stage with stories about both the United Way of Wyandotte County and the Children's Campus of Kansas City, which will move into its newly constructed building in downtown KCK this summer. Because so much is going on, including western Wyandotte County's destination casino approval and ongoing progress on the Kansas City Wizards soccer stadium and Cerner Corporation building, we've compiled several of the headlines in our "Radar" department so you can stay up-to-date.

Elsewhere in the magazine, you'll find a preview of the second annual KCK Film Festival, as well as a call to vote for Kaw Point Park as one of the "8 Wonders of Kansas Geography." And although you may be sick of winter, we hope Cole Soucie's inventive snow sculptures, pictured both on the cover and later in the magazine, will bring a smile to your face.

As always, enjoy a round-up of featured local events, as well as seasonal recipes and more. And once you're finished with the magazine, be sure to visit us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/thedotmag](http://www.facebook.com/thedotmag) and let us know what you think. I'd stick around longer to tell you more about this issue, but I need to excuse myself in order to peruse other event calendars and see which celebrities are in town. It's a new year, and I'm ready for my 15 minutes of fame. How about you? **d**



## have a story idea?

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**BACKFIRE**  
BBQ  
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Legends' newest restaurant combines barbecue, bikes and entertainment for a dining experience that transcends a typical meal.







PHOTOS BY BRANDON CUMMINS

NEW IN TOWN

conversations

# Hot off the grill

PHOTOS & TEXT BY KATY RYAN

## Contact

Head to Backfire BBQ featuring Orange County Choppers, located at the Legends at Village West (1843 Village West Pkwy., Kansas City, Kan.) For more information visit [www.backfirebarbeque.com](http://www.backfirebarbeque.com) or call 913.788.3838.

The 8,300-square-foot restaurant is open 11 a.m.-midnight Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m.-1:30 a.m. Friday and Saturday, and 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Sunday with a brunch from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Lunch prices range from \$8.95-\$14.99/person, and dinner prices average \$19.99/person.

You could say that Steve Schussler knows a thing or two about restaurants. The tireless entrepreneur has founded and created Rainforest Cafe, Galaxy Drive-In, T-REX Cafe, Yak & Yeti, Betty & Joe's and Hot Dog Hall of Fame.

In December, Schussler added another concept to his extensive resume: Backfire BBQ featuring Orange County Choppers, a dining experience that unites mouthwatering barbecue with motorcycle culture, a theme visible from the gleaming choppers perched outside the restaurant to the expansive interior that displays choppers, related memorabilia and a fully stocked gift shop.

Backfire BBQ is a carefully constructed concept that didn't come together overnight. Schussler says the restaurant has been in the works for over three years, a typical amount of time for Schussler's company, Schussler Creative Inc., to create each venue.

"It's a long, long, tedious process and I try to explain that to people who like the hospitality business and talk as though they would like to be in the restaurant business," he says. "It's not by any means for the faint-hearted. There's so much research and development that goes into building the brand specifications."

These specs range from big decisions, such as décor and food selection, to small details such as color schemes and menu fonts. Working through each of these doesn't only guarantee a successful concept, but is also a testament to the founding company's dedication.

"There's a lot that goes into what we do and I'm really proud of that," Schussler says. "It shows that it was thought-out and there's a lot more behind than just saying, 'Hey, let's open up a restaurant.'"

And arguably one of the most important parts of a restaurant is its food, and at Backfire, special attention was paid to developing the culinary offerings found



## Let's eat!

Sample menu items at Backfire BBQ featuring Orange County Choppers include:

### Appetizers:

NOLA Spiced BBQ Shrimp  
Chicken Wings – Choose from Atomic, Buffalo, Backfire BBQ, Chinese Takeout or Thai  
Fried Green Tomatoes

### Soup, Salad & Sandwiches:

Chopper Chili- Red, yellow and green peppers, chipotle and chili beans  
Grilled Chicken Chopper Salad - Grilled marinated chicken breast, tomato, bacon, cheddar, red onion, almonds and fried collard greens  
KC Rocker Reuben - Thinly sliced house smoked brisket, slaw, Swiss cheese and Thousand Island dressing on Texas toast  
Singing The Blues Burger - Pickled red onion, blue cheese fondue and blue cheese crumbles  
The Smoker – a burger topped with slices of Backfire slow smoked brisket with BBQ sauce on the side

### Barbeque and Chops:

The Trike – Taste three BBQ meats: hand pulled slow hickory smoked pork, hill country style brisket and ribs  
Deep Seared Catfish  
Café Chop – 18 ounce Cowboy Ribeye

### Desserts:

Banana Bread Pudding – House made banana bread, sliced bananas, rum caramel and whipped cream  
Death By Chocolate Cake – Chocolate cake with layers of chocolate ganache, toffee and caramel sauce  
Menu information courtesy of Pigs Fly PR, Schussler Creative Inc. and Golden Publicity.



on the menu.

"It takes a big set of kahunas to open a barbecue restaurant in a barbecue town," Schussler says. "You have to give credit where credit's due—Kansas City has a lot of good food. It's a food town. So I'm very proud of the fact that we spent so much time in the Levy innovative kitchens in Chicago testing the food, testing the plates, testing the garnishes."

Family-owned and Chicago-based Levy Restaurants joins Orange County Choppers and Schussler Creative Inc. to create the "trifecta of talent" behind Backfire BBQ, the first restaurant to "feature the custom motorcycles of Paul Teutul, Sr.'s 'Orange County Choppers,'" according to a press release. Adds Schussler, "We've come together to showcase a new barbecue restaurant design, a new brand attitude, and customized culinary wizardry."

Schussler also credits Levy Restaurants' extensive culinary experience, including ownership of a Chicago barbecue restaurant, in creating Backfire BBQ's menu that boasts everything from jumbo wings and chopper chili to mom's after school meatloaf and a bar hopper brisket platter.

"They take the food to another level and there's no shortage of time or expertise or money or product that they'll use until we get down to where we believe it's not just good, but it's excellent," Schussler says.

Because research and development is a top priority for both Schussler and Levy Restaurants, Schussler says he committed a lot of his time to conducting barbecue research throughout the city.

"I've been to every barbecue restaurant in Kansas City, including some of the blues and jazz bars," he says. "I've done my homework by not just talking about the food but sam-



pling and experiencing it, and I think that's a necessity and how you become passionate, too. Enthusiasm and passion are two of the biggest engines of success but there's nothing that can replace the time that is spent researching."

Located at the Legends of Village West, Backfire BBQ is a seamless fit with the district's reputation as an entertainment destination. Schussler credits RED Development and the Unified Government for making the restaurant's location possible, and notes that the restaurant is designed to complement neighboring T-REX Cafe, not detract from another of Schussler's concepts.

"We have to protect our neighbors," he says. "What you don't want to do is take away someone else's success in any way. You want to add to it, and I think that's so important in deciding what we were going to do. A lot of people questioned our savvy in opening a barbecue restaurant in a barbecue town, but you have to be committed to the food product."

And what Schussler and the other partners hope is that commitment is translated to the guest experience. Yet judging by the large numbers of patrons since Backfire's opening, Legends visitors are intrigued by the food and atmosphere.

"I want people to say 'Wow,'" Schussler says. "I want them to come in noticing that the place is clean, the people are so friendly and the food is off the charts. If they can say those three things, they're the best PR and marketing that any restaurateur would be proud to have, and that's really important to us. People have to love the food because ultimately you're a restaurant, and it's all about the food."

What makes Backfire different from other restaurants, however, is its entertainment-driven concept, an experience that includes a retail shop within the restaurant. Schussler says they "hit the mark" on the retail mix, which includes bike and "American Choppers" memorabilia.

"Making people feel good is part of having another experience inside a restaurant, and that's why I like to add retail," he says. "People want to spend money and you have to give them an opportunity to do that by having good quality product, good inventory and something that mixes and matches well with the food product and the ambiance."

An extension of that ambiance is Backfire's location at the Legends, a milestone for Wyandotte County as it hosts the first Backfire restaurant in the country. Schussler says the surrounding amenities including Kansas Speedway, the soon-to-be-built casino and Schlitterbahn Vacation Village are proof of a "huge investment" in the county, and requires Schussler and the restaurant to consistently offer a memorable experience in order to compete with the surrounding excitement.

"I think it's important to keep that bar raised," he says. "People say, 'Why Kansas City?' And that makes me so angry. Kansas City is such a wonderful town. Walt Disney started in a garage in Kansas City, and I like to say I'm following in Walt Disney's footsteps. We had the first T-REX Cafe in the country, it was in Kansas City. The first Backfire BBQ featuring Orange County Choppers is in Kansas City, and I think that says a lot about how I feel about the city." **d**



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